

ISSUE 95



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# NZ HUNTER

M A G A Z I N E

JUNE / JULY 2023

## **SURVIVAL IN THE WILDERNESS**

Mike Spray covers survival techniques by following the tale of Andreas Thirling, a hunter lost for five days

## **143DS MANAHOU RUSA**

Caleb Archer recounts an epic week in the wilds of Te Urewera chasing Reds and Rusa

## **SOUTH WESTLAND DOUBLE**

Rueben Jones takes us on a wilderness adventure in truly remote country, and is rewarded with a stag and a buck



# STYLE



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LEFT NEXEN RODIAN MTX TYRE IMAGE: Machine sidewall design  
RIGHT NEXEN ROADIAN MTX TYRE IMAGE: Beast sidewall design

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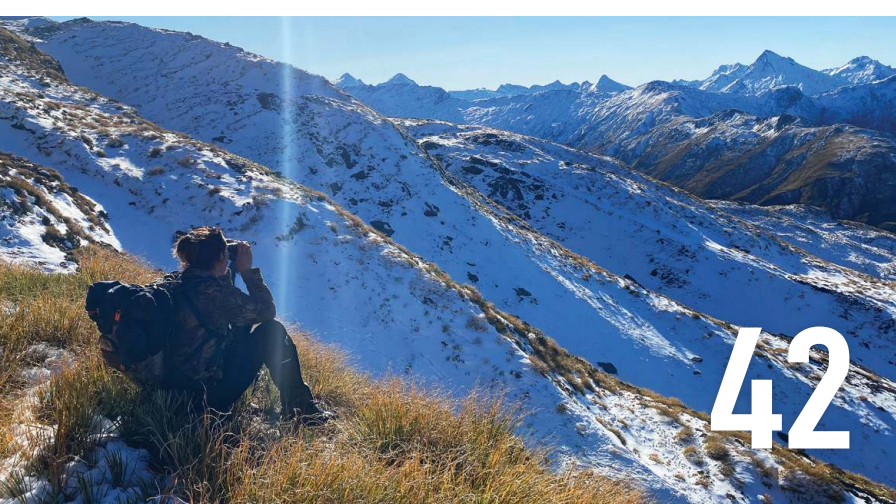
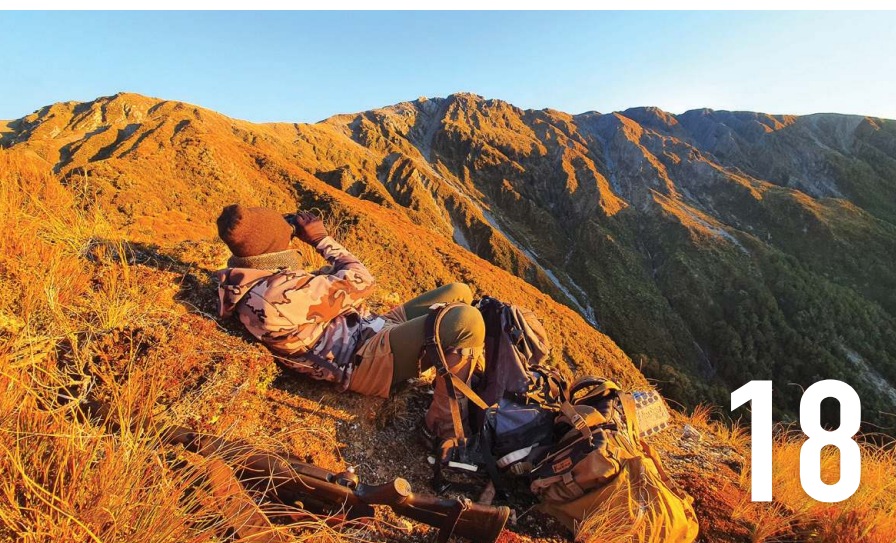


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LECLERC SATIN BRONZE WITH SATIN BLACK LIP | 17" 18" 20"







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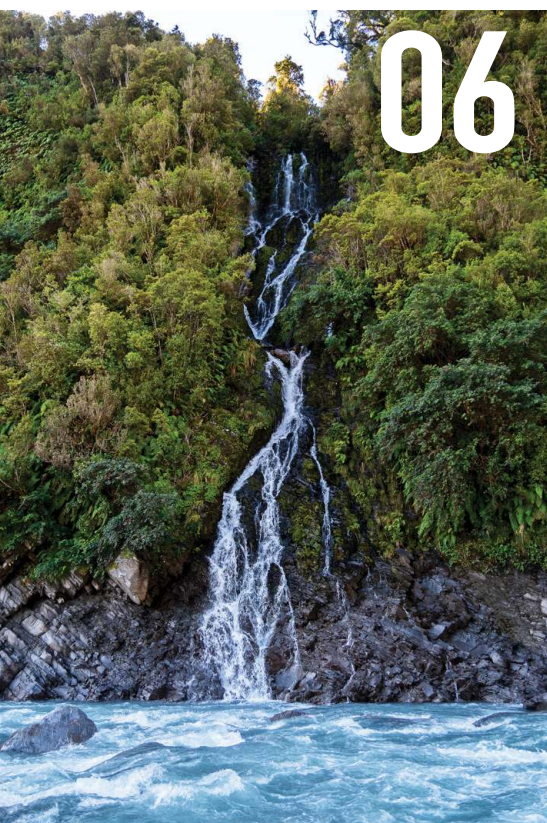
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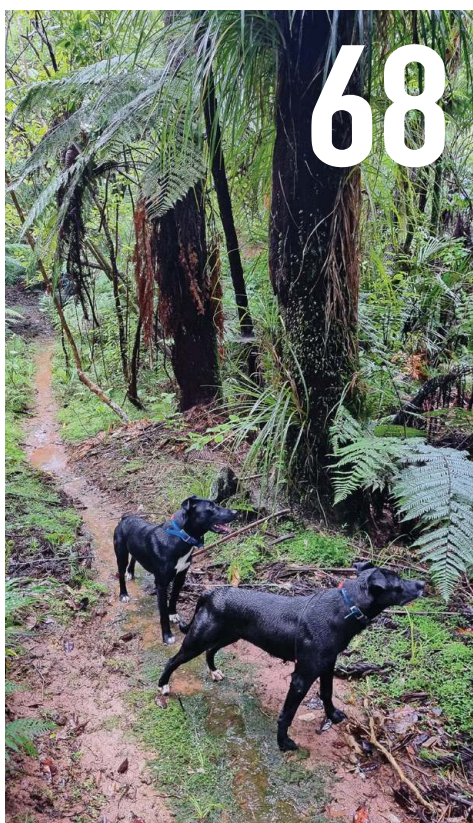
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## COVER PHOTO

Dave Greig and Pete Doonan with a great West Coast bush stag.

## NZ Hunter welcomes articles

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# AWORD FROM THE EDITOR

It's been a real mixed bag of a roar this year, with La Nina fading and repeated Westerly weather fronts bringing more bad weather than good - especially in the South Island – the complete opposite to last year!

The roaring has been very patchy and localised as well in most areas. This has no doubt saved a few trophies in remote areas as the weather hasn't been conducive to covering large amounts of country, and it's been pretty quiet and harder to find the mature stags unless you struck it lucky. The odd good head has still been shot, but not in the numbers of Roar 2022 that's for sure.

We are now three months into our flood recovery and still have at least that many to go before we get the paddocks clear and clean enough that we can contemplate planting something again, and we haven't even started on the house and building repairs. But we have managed to squeeze in a couple of film trips with some good success, especially on Sika – so there will be another season of the TV Show next year!

**We are now able to release the results of the LandCare camera trial on the efficacy of the new ProDeer deer**

**repellent verses the existing Epro EDR.** This trial was commissioned by OSPRI and run over several months before and after the Kaweka Aerial 1080 operation last September. They installed trail cameras in the southern block which had the ProDeer, the northern block which had EDR, and a control block to the west which had no 1080 applied. The results were that deer abundance was the same before and after the 1080 operation in the block that had ProDeer repellent bait. This is very pleasing as the EDR has largely been phased out and ProDeer is the only current deer repellent solution going forward. Another big plus of the ProDeer is that it is incorporated right throughout the bait, not just applied to the outside just before being aerially distributed like the EDR. Quite a number of dead deer were observed in the EDR block after the drop and we think that was because the heavy rain straight after the drop washed the deer repellent off but wasn't enough to wash the toxin out of the bait. No dead deer were observed in the ProDeer block – again, a very pleasing result. Now we

just need to sort out the issue with kea and deer repellent



and we'll then have a viable option to protect vulnerable deer herds right throughout the country, while an alternative to aerial 1080 is found.

**Well done to the GAC for the up and coming launch of their "Better Hunting" program** – a safety and education program to ensure the sport of hunting

continues into the future. This will also be great for hunters "social licence", to enable the public to see all the good things that the majority of hunters do instead of reporting just the bad done by the minority. See page 99 for more details.

**Make sure you keep the weekend of 1st and 2nd of July free to get on down to Te Anau for the FWF's Winter Wapiti Weekend.** There is a range of antler, horn and tusk, and photographic competitions, and seminars on a range of topics by the experts in their various fields. The Wapiti documentary "Beyond the Odds" we have been filming and producing for the FWF will also be showing at the Te Anau Fiordland Cinema.

**Go to the FWF website for more information. The NZ Hunter team will be there presenting and supporting, so we hope to see you all there!**

**Greg**

## SPOT THE LOGO

The winners for last issue are **Brian Bates** and **Debbie Keen**. Logos appeared on page 79, the Owl Optics advert, and page 98 the Beretta Xtreme advert.



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## HI GREG

In the NZ Hunter Issue 69 magazine in the Shepherd DRS Test Fire article you said that the go to load for 20" T3 7mm Mags is 69.5gn of Reloader 23 behind a Hornady 162gn ELD-X with Federal 215 primers and Norma brass.

I was wondering if this is a standard load or a hot load that needs to be worked up to? I have the same rifle and would like to try this load.

I have Nosler once-fired brass and 155gn Federal TLR projectiles – any help in loading for the 7mm short barrelled Rem Mags would be very much appreciated.

## HI COLIN

REGARDS, COLIN

**That load was specific for our own 20" factory barrelled Tikka 7mm Rem Mag.** Yes, it is up around 63,000psi for 2975fps with the 162gn ELD-X at a 65thou jump which is totally safe for repeated use, but you need to work up carefully to see what load gives you this same velocity. In most Tikkas it's between 68gns and 69gns of Reloder 23. In some US factory rifles or custom barrels and chambers with tighter bore specs and shorter throats the load may be as low as 65gns for the same velocity. The important thing is don't exceed that velocity in a 20" barrel or you'll start to get into pressures not recommended for regular use. Simple rule - all else being equal, the same velocity equals about the same pressure despite the different powder charge.

As to the 155gn TLR, you'll take about a grain more powder than whatever you are using with the 162gn, and seating depth wise we found as much as 100thou jump to work best for us. You will have to experiment yourself of course to find what works in your rifle.

CHEERS, GREG

Visit [www.nzhunter.co.nz](http://www.nzhunter.co.nz) for this issue's "Spot the Logo" Competition

Two prizes of \$100 H&F vouchers to be won [www.nzhunter.co.nz/spot-the-logo-competition](http://www.nzhunter.co.nz/spot-the-logo-competition)

## HI GREG

I have bought a new T3 6.5 Creedmoor with a fancy Nightforce scope.

I had put through 26 x 3 shot groups (only two went over 1MOA), with 4 being factory and 22 being handloads with two different projectiles and different charge weights. Once I settled on two powder charges and one projectile, I proceeded to seat the projectiles out and try and get closer to the lands. I expected my already tight groups to get better. However the exact opposite occurred. The groups went from 12mm out to 31mm as I got closer. I increased the OAL 0.485 mm over four loads. Is this a normal thing to happen or have I somehow mucked up something else? The cases were all new Sako brass, primers, powder and projectiles were from the same packet – Hornady 147 gr ELD-M projectiles, CCI primers, AR2209 powder with charges of 40.7 and 41.8gns. Do you suggest I just go back a step and load what worked well (prior to changing the seating depth) and call it quits? I am just wanting to shoot deer out to about 250 and goats to 600-800 yards in time if my skills allow. I have reloaded about 1000 rounds for my two 243's, so I'm not an expert but not a novice either.

REGARDS, MATTHEW

## HI MATTHEW

**As you've found out, every rifle and projectile is a rule unto itself, especially with seating depth.** We have also found that the newer style ELD-M and ELD-X Hornady projectiles often like jumping further to the lands, especially in Tikka and Sako rifle barrels and throats. I usually start around a 60 thou/1.5mm jump with these, and fine tune from there if the results aren't what I expect. You haven't mentioned just where you were in relation to the lands, just that you extended the OAL .485mm which is about 20 thou? This is not a huge change unless you were already quite close to the lands and you are now touching or even jamming a little? You haven't said if you were getting satisfactory velocity? And how about pressure? In our experience you cannot push the ELD-M and Xs flat out in the 6.5 Creedmoor without the groups opening up. The exceptionally good Hornady Precision Hunter ammo with the 143gn ELD-X is quite mild pressure wise in Tikkas and does around 2600fps out of a 24 inch barrel. We found this is very hard to beat velocity wise while maintaining good accuracy. This load is jumping plenty (160thou/4mm) to the lands in Tikkas too.

Simply, if you are happy with the velocity and accuracy you are getting at whatever seating depth shoots best, so long as the pressure is safe, then run with that!

CHEERS, GREG

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# INTO THE THICK OF IT

WRITTEN BY  
DAVE GREIG | @WILDERNESS\_LENS





Sunrise in the West Coast bush

## It was into the thick, shitty bush of the West Coast I went with me old mate Pete, nearing the end of March and with the roar all but upon us

Pete and I had had a punt at a new bit of country on the coast earlier in the month, pushing up valley and onto the tops to get a gauge of what the deer numbers were like. The numbers turned out to be lean up in the tussock, but the sign further down on the flats and in the bush was promising. So, with that in mind, we decided to come back and focus our attention on this area.

We set about bush stalking the country that looked likely on the maps in the hope of bumping into some old relic that had spent his life evading hunters in the thick supplejack and bushlawyer.

This kind of hunting is a far cry from the open tussock of the East Coast. I know bush hunting is not everyone's

cup of tea, and who doesn't like observing a big old stag out in the open tussock, but Pete and I really enjoy it. It's just a different type of hunting and everything you see or hear is going to be at close range. There are no window-shopping miles out on a spotting scope in the bush.

**Things were still and quiet for the first day as Pete led on through the bush.** The only animals encountered during the first half were goats. It was interesting to see the way these animals had claimed certain pockets, and in these areas the deer numbers were low with no real sign around - no prints, no tree rubbings. It seemed like the natural features of the valley served as territorial boundaries because when we crossed the river and worked our way up onto a large bush terrace, things were almost the complete opposite, and we began to see fresh and regular deer sign.

As we stalked our way through the

patchy bush, Pete found an antler sticking out of the ground, which turned out to be a fully intact set. **A decent set at that, covered in a thick green moss.** As we sat it up on a stump and looked at it, the mind wandered thinking about how he met his end. Was he shot and never found, or was he on the receiving end of a hiding from another stag? One of the many mysteries of hunting that we will never know. I threw the head around my shoulders and carried him out as it seemed a shame to let him lay to waste. As I carried the head back out to camp I felt it was a good indication of the potential in this new area.

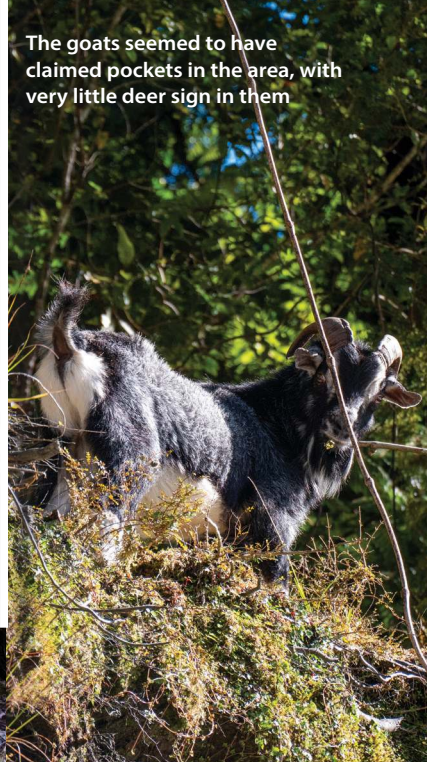
Daybreak brought with it more opportunities as we committed to hunting a another new area. We climbed up onto the bush terraces and fought our way through the thick bush that opened into occasional clear pockets of tree fern and broadleaf. **We were coming across fresh sign almost straight away and there was a prominent game trail that deer had been using to make their way up and down off the terrace.**

The strong smell of rutting stag was carried on a gentle morning headwind





A fully intact set of antlers we found buried in the moss - how did he meet his end?



The goats seemed to have claimed pockets in the area, with very little deer sign in them



Home sweet home, the bush camp

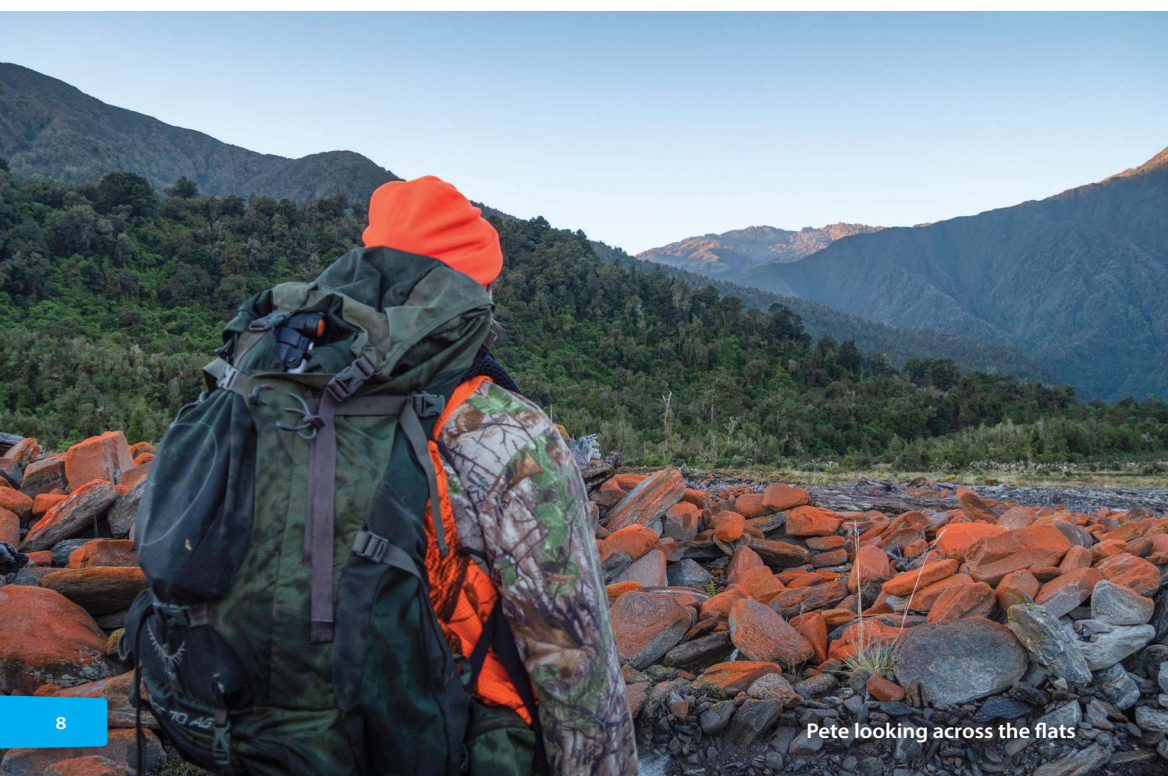
as we slowly pushed on past saplings that had been twisted and smashed up at the hands of a wound-up animal. Evidence of violence, contrasting with the pleasant dappled light filtering through the canopy and a calm quietness and occasional birdsong was a weird combination, building excitement and anticipation. When hunting stags in the bush there's no real indicator that tells you things are about to kick off. It goes from calm to a high level of intensity in a moment.

**but after a while made his way into us.** Trying to move round in this bush would have been hopeless and would have stacked the odds heavily against us, so we opted to stay put as we had the wind and a decent view of the surrounding area. It's always a high stakes dance with a smart old stag in the bush, as the stand offs are generally intense with a lot of guess work as to where he is and what line he will take to approach. The eyes are working overtime, scanning the bush

for any movement. The fear of giving yourself away keeps you on edge.

**Sure enough, his curiosity saw him come right in.** He appeared through a thick screen of bush almost right up ahead of where we were waiting. As he slowly made his way closer to us, we were lucky to have a clear opening to get a good look at his head and body, which is something of a rarity in this tight stuff. Ducking under low scrub he came through with his head down before stopping dead and looking up at us around ten yards away. **My mind was already made up, so I wasted no time in squeezing off with the crosshairs at the base of his neck.** Nobody likes chasing down a wounded stag, so it was a massive relief to see him drop on the spot. Good for the animal to make a quick clean kill.

After a few big deep breaths, I turned round to Pete who was on the camera just behind me. It seemed he was as taken back as I was, as it all played out textbook-like. I've been lucky to take a few in the bush, but the anticipation seemed to be a bit higher this time round due to the stand-off that felt like it lasted for ages, and the fact I got a good look at him before I fired.

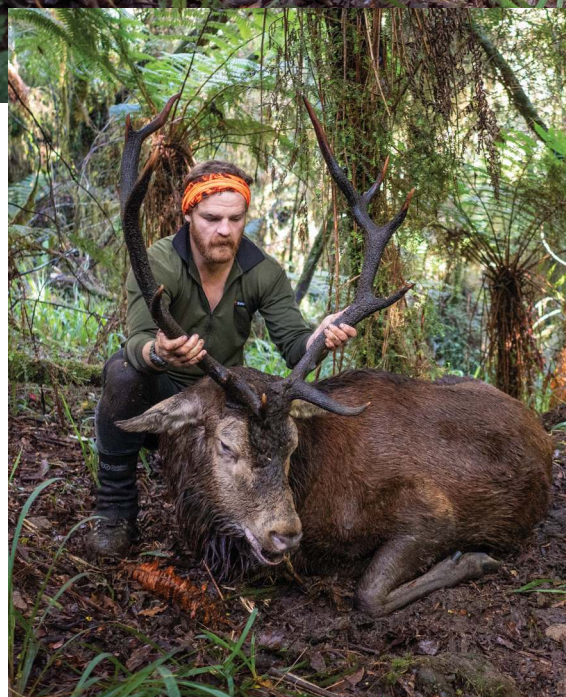


Pete looking across the flats





A great hunt finishing with a great stag. A textbook roar hunt



We walked over to the stag and we were able to quickly confirm that he was a big gnarly old boy as we had suspected, although possibly past his best in terms of antler. He was grey in the face, carried on a big old heavy frame, along with all the other signs of age. **What an awesome feeling.** The reality is that these moments don't swing around all that often, especially with being a little

fussier and more selective these days. So, taking the time to soak it all up feels important.

We took the head, backsteaks and hindquarters off the stag and slowly worked our way off the bush terrace back down to the river and from there, back out to the truck. It was a punishing few hours with the antlers catching every bit of supplejack as we bashed our way down to the river.

There doesn't seem to be an easy way around public land bush hunting. You

might get the rub of the green with a lucky one here and there, but for the most part, you have to spend honest time on the hoof to get the wins and without the work, it wouldn't be the same anyway.

**Another awesome trip, another set of antlers to hang on the wall and a story to go with them.**



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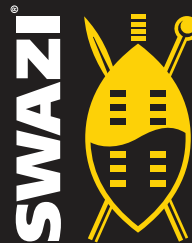
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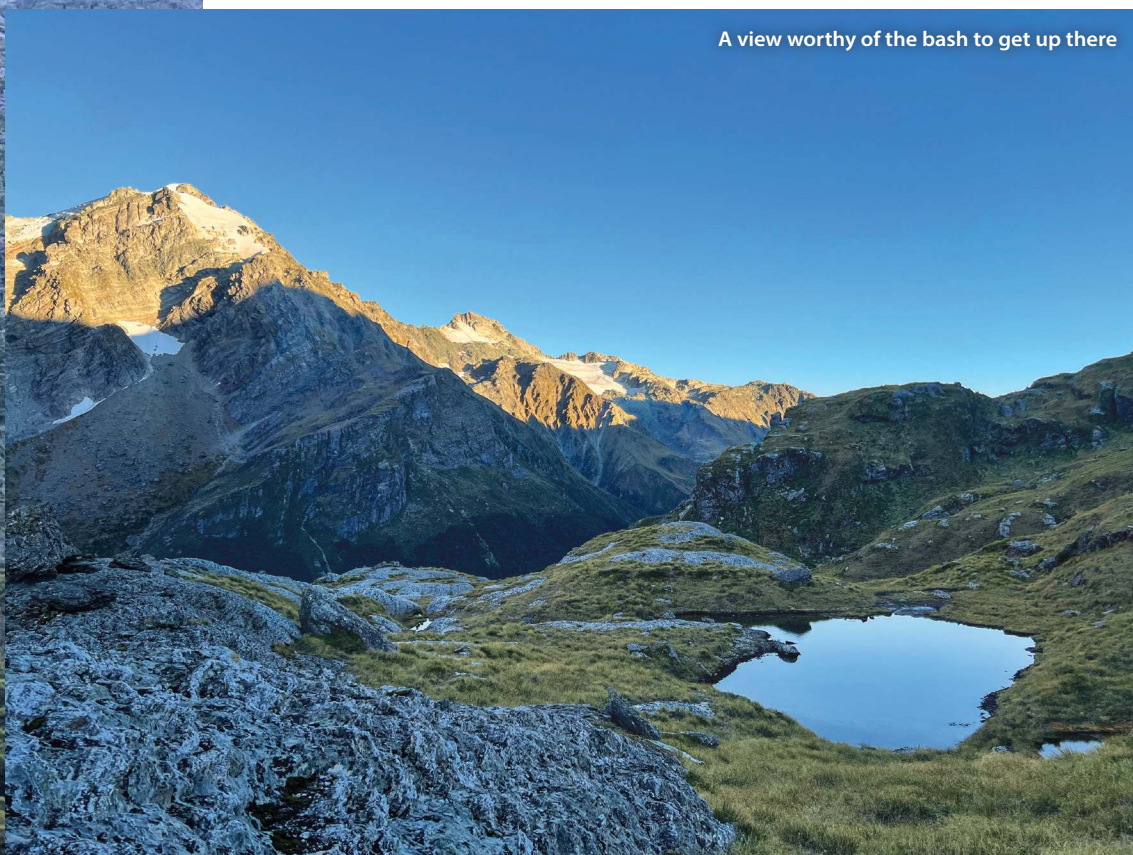




# Out the back of **NOWHERE**

WRITTEN BY ~ RUEBEN JONES





A view worthy of the bash to get up there

## After a few hours of South Island sub-alpine monkey scrub bashing I had broken out into a world of tussock, rock, and glacier

**Our only roaring horn, the sleeves on my merino shirt and a litre or two of sweat seemed a small price to pay for the view of the basin above me. It wasn't long before the critters began moving about. A lonely one-antlered stag revealed his track to the tops and a couple of chamois could be seen high up on a steep rock face.**

I kept climbing higher and higher before realising it was now going to be a headtorch mission to the bottom. The only trouble was that a headtorch wouldn't last five seconds on my head fighting through the thick dracophyllum, alpine totara and leatherwood. I radioed Charlie on the opposite face and told him I'd stay up here and see him the next day. **As the air began its nightly haunt down valley I hunkered in behind a rock and tried to sleep the best I could under the stars.**

As the morning dawned I wasn't too bothered about hunting in the slightest. It was only the third day of

13 on a roar trip that had been in the making for half a year. The plan was to spend a few days hunting our way from the East Coast, to then climb cross the main divide and explore some Westland catchments before looping back to the car through more East Coast watersheds.

**At that point in time though, I was out of water, very cold and very hungry.** The wind had dramatically picked up. It was probably for the better that I hadn't tried this descent in the dark with the fragmented forest floor often opening up in deep crevasses or dropping off bluffs at a moment's notice. I found myself stepping off ledges into the tops of beech trees, then climbing down the tree to the next level, unsure if I'd then reach a dead end and have to try to climb back up. By 10am I'd made it to the base camp and was relieved to find my jet plane stash.

It was April 3rd, and we had heard two roars in three days. It was hard to say how many deer were living in this catchment, but I'd expected a bit more action than this and was hoping they hadn't started to shut up shop





A quarter of an inch off the magical ten-inch mark. A fine trophy nonetheless

Dividing and conquering for an evening glassing session, I picked another series of touching topo lines to navigate. **The topo map wasn't lying.** Clawing my way up the waterfalls and slippery snow grass I was careful to remember my route. I didn't want another night out! The basin that appeared screamed chamois, and before long I had spied a big-bodied buck heading quickly for a saddle. Camera out, zoom in, autofocus. Good hooks, good length, big body. Working as quickly as possible I set up. At 460 yards on a steep uphill I had to trust the rangefinder,

but in the excitement pulled the first shot just over the shoulder. He made a fatal mistake by standing around long enough for me to reload and send another pill, this one making its mark.

With a few hundred vertical metres to cover I was running to get to him before dark. Time for a quick photo and a butchery before taking off to find my way down the steep face. At camp I pulled out the tape and it revealed the buck was

a quarter of an inch off the magical ten-inch mark. A fine trophy nonetheless.

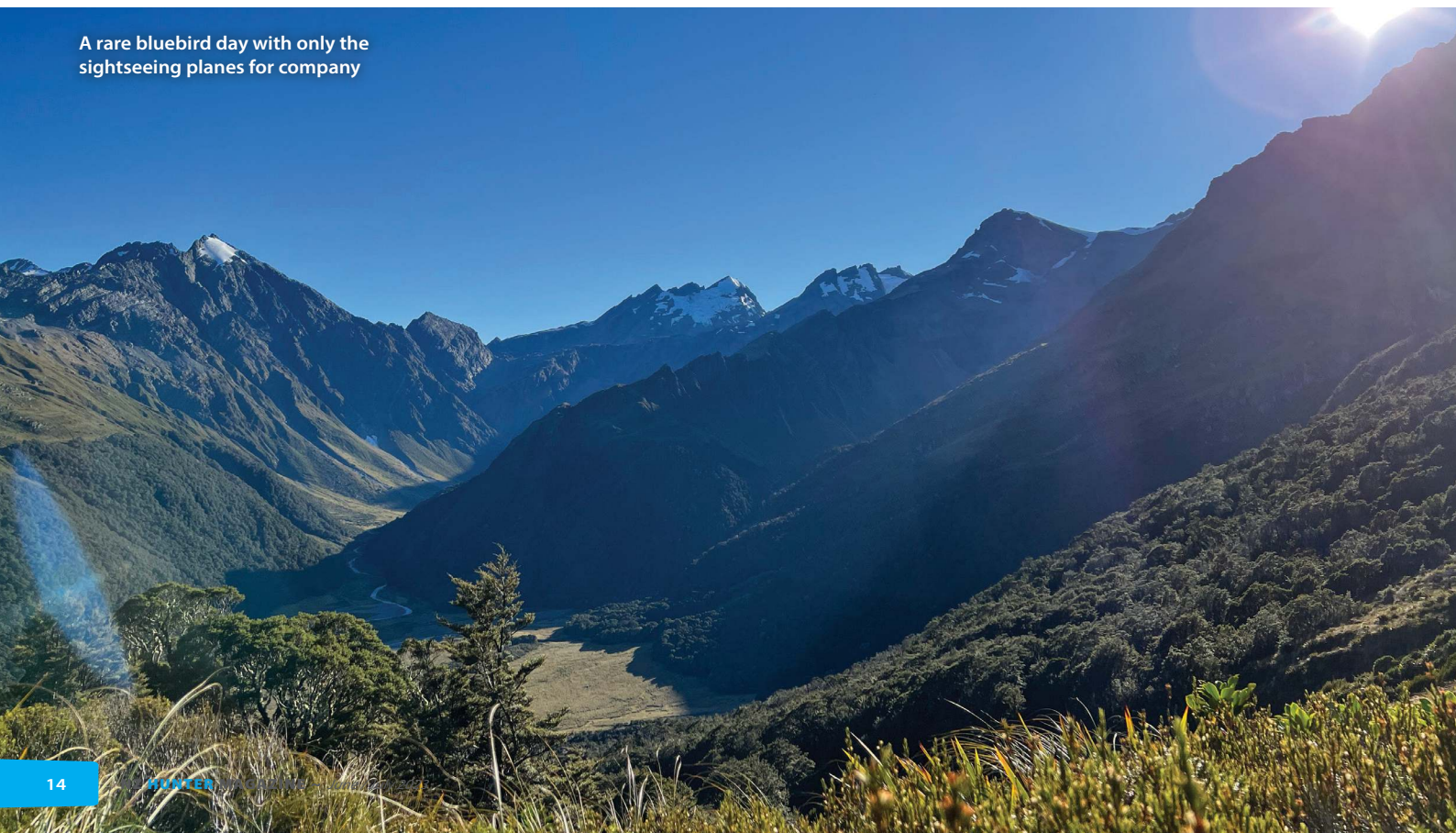
Next day we were on the West Coast with wet boots and a few million sandflies for company. It had been a surprisingly quick jaunt across the divide, with the only excitement being a very long horned chamois doe that had us fooled for half an hour. Dropping the thousand vert again to reach the river hadn't been quite as simple. Thick scrub and steep bush made for slow going. Thankfully, we had made a significant food drop above the treeline which reduced the pack volume a bit. The initial assessment of this catchment was much the same as the East, with very little roaring sign and a few half-hearted scrapes on the beech trees. We did our best to keep dry feet moving down river. Charlie seemed almost superhuman in his ability to jump from rock to rock, and going was generally easy. Just my luck, the very last crossing was just above the plimsoll line of my boots. Bugger.

**Five minutes later we were pumped full of adrenaline.** After quickly setting up camp on the downwind edge of a large clearing, a heavy set of brow, bez and trez tines materialised on the bush edge not ten metres from the tent. Charlie slowly reached for the camera, I slowly reached for the gun. He smelt us and spooked, and despite a quick dash into the bush and a few hind calls all I saw was a flash of brown. From zero stag action to our first close quarters encounter of the trip. About 100 metres up the face he let out a moan and Charlie took off after him. I chose to cross the river and look out over the large Westland

for the year. We still had the West Coast to get to, so we had to keep moving. It is always difficult to judge how long you should spend in one area. **With so much time up our sleeves were we better to sit and wait them out in this proven country that I'd scouted in summer or keep pushing?**

A couple of kilometres up valley and away from the beech forests we found ourselves setting up for the night.

A rare bluebird day with only the sightseeing planes for company





clearing for the evening.

I popped onto a small terrace and with the naked eye could immediately see deer out and about in the tussock.

**Quickly I set up the camera and got footage of a stag with great tops chasing his harem about on the bush edge about 1.5 kilometres across the clearing.** Clear dominance over the hinds and 14 strong tines sent me into an excited panic and I didn't even bother to glass the rest of the flat, grabbing the gun and shoving my Mercator and a couple of spare bullets into the bino harness.

The next few minutes were a blur, following small depressions and the river as fast as I could, knowing well that without my elevated terrace view I'd have a hard time locating this stag and had to trust it wouldn't go too far. **The river that I had so carefully crossed half an hour before became a waist-deep jog downstream.** I had to pause to splash water all over my body to try and reduce my heat signature to keep the sandflies at bay.

When I finally got to my reference point of an uprooted stump a quick range said 206 yards. I couldn't find a rest to save myself and my heart was going crazy, I had just sprinted nearly a kilometre and a half. There were now multiple younger stags off to the side of the harem too, with a couple also sporting impressive heads. Good ones for the camera that was still with my pack. I tucked back into a fold and kept pushing towards the stag, trying to slow my heartbeat and keep calm. When I next rose from the tussock I had a round in the chamber and the stag was right in front of me. A quick roar and he charged. It didn't take long to pull the trigger.

My knife was still dull from cleaning the chamois which made the sandfly-ridden butchery process much more frustrating. **They were so bad that I would make a single cut with the knife then roll on the ground to get rid of the layer of bloodsuckers.** I grabbed all I could carry and made my way back across the river, up onto the terrace and back to camp in the dark.

The next two days were rained out, and the downloaded Netflix was on last reserves. We had been in contact with a mate on the Inreach and forecasts had suggested up to 200mm of rain in the coming days. Given that we had at least 45 kilometres of walking to do just to get out of here, using rivers as our route, this news was a slight concern. We had gone for an evening hunt in the rain on the same clearing that I had shot my 14. A young stag came right in to five metres and both of us yearned for our cameras.



Our spotter getting a workout trying to find the pot of gold, only to have a stag sneak up on us from behind!

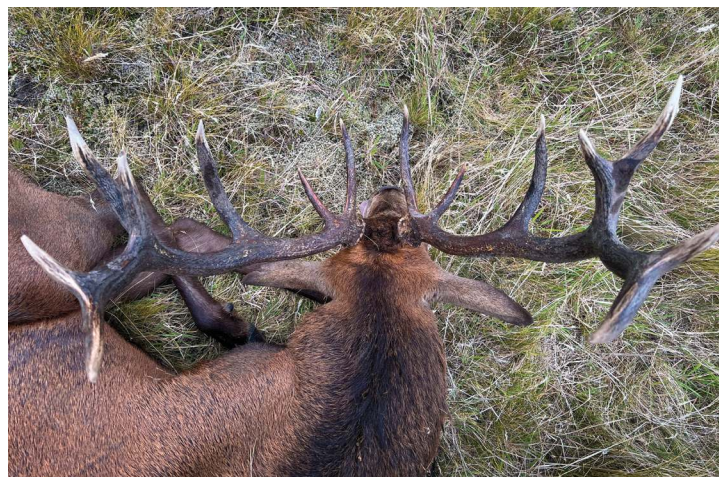
On the way back to the tent and fly a nice 12 appeared on the terrace right where I had first spotted the 14. A quick "needs another year or two" from Charlie and that was that. Back to try and dry out.

**The next day it dawned clear. We packed up quickly and made the bold move to push on into our holy land for the trip.** I had been sent a few marks from a hard out adventurer and had braced for a serious mission around the gorge. After a brief trounce up a terrible spur we hit a 100 metre drop to the river. Retracing our steps we soon picked up a deer track and clung to it with our lives. Before we knew it we were punching out onto a massive tussock flat. It was the most marvellous place I had ever been, with a long history of backcountry legends paying a visit. The effect of the rain was now negligible, some 12 hours after the last heavy downpour and a sure sign we were on the West Coast.

**We spent a couple of days glassing countless younger stags.** It wasn't till I spied an older stag on a warm night, pushing into a hanging basin, that I got excited. We made a play for him the next day, starting under head torch. Our one hour prediction to make the bushline



The first look at my stag, at well over two kilometres away



500 vert above us became three hours. The bluffs and rocks don't stop at the bushline around here! **Surprisingly, the stag was still there despite our late arrival.** His position was revealed when an impressive young stag spied us from 100 metres and let out a bellow. The old stag picked up the hinds and bolted. My only footage was a shaky video that showed the stag was past his prime and losing tops.

Splitting up that evening on the way back to the tent, I found myself glassing a bush edge I hadn't seen previously.





Charlie braving the sandflies to hang out the washing after two days in the tent

What walked out had me ripping my hair out. A huge bodied animal with visible antlers through the Leupold scope from 4 kilometres just on dark. **There was no time that night, so we made a plan to be there at first light.** I was buzzing from the moment the alarm went off. We flew across the flats and just as we approached a vantage point in range of the stag's previous position a large swarm of a hunter's worst nark flew over. The squawking of the paradise ducks sent everything back to the cover of the bush. To make matters worse, Charlie had

been on yearling duty. I was really looking forward to some fresh venison but unfortunately no such yearling appeared for him, and some alpine pest control was undertaken to ensure I had some protein for a stew. I hadn't really eaten in a couple of days.

**We made our way out of that paradise with a vow to return.** Down the gorge, across the flat, up the river, back to the food dump. A massive day but fresh socks and jet planes went down a treat. The clearings hunted for the next two days should have held the stag of a lifetime. Despite feed galore we only spied a hind and yearling. Although they saw and smelt us, they didn't seem to care about us at all. A sign of the hunting pressure maybe.

We had been lucky to get most of the

way back to the car with fine weather. It was only fitting for this country that the final day to get back to the car was in torrential rain. **At one stage I looked at a DoC marker at hip height on the track nearly submerged.** Safe to say the chaffing was next level. I would have been sickened if I had thought about the amount of caffeine and sugar in the form of Gu energy chews and Vitasport sachets we consumed on that final day.

I'd had plenty of time to mull over my stag. Although a fine south Westland specimen, he lacked length and weight but most importantly age. I couldn't help but think I'd shot him a couple of years before his prime. Upon reflection I had never really assessed the stag properly, instead seeing two developed sets of tops bouncing along the tussock and getting tunnel vision. The countless days of crawling through scrub and up mountains with the weight of his skull and antlers bearing down gave the trophy a new meaning. **That would not be the end of my adventures here, with many late nights to come reflecting on the past 13 days. 'Til next year.**





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# The Measure of a Man

WRITTEN BY  
DANIEL LOVETT

**I was chasing a new challenge and wilderness tahr hunting seemed to fit the bill**

I'm no stranger to week-long walk-in trips, having covered most of the Tararua, Ruahine and Kaweka Forest Parks but I knew South Westland was going to be a step up. Everything I had read and heard suggested this was the real measure of a man.

Having recently taken over a growing business I was time poor and always knew deer were going to occupy most of my hunting time so made enquiries about engaging a guide. Enter Joseph Peter at Hard Yards

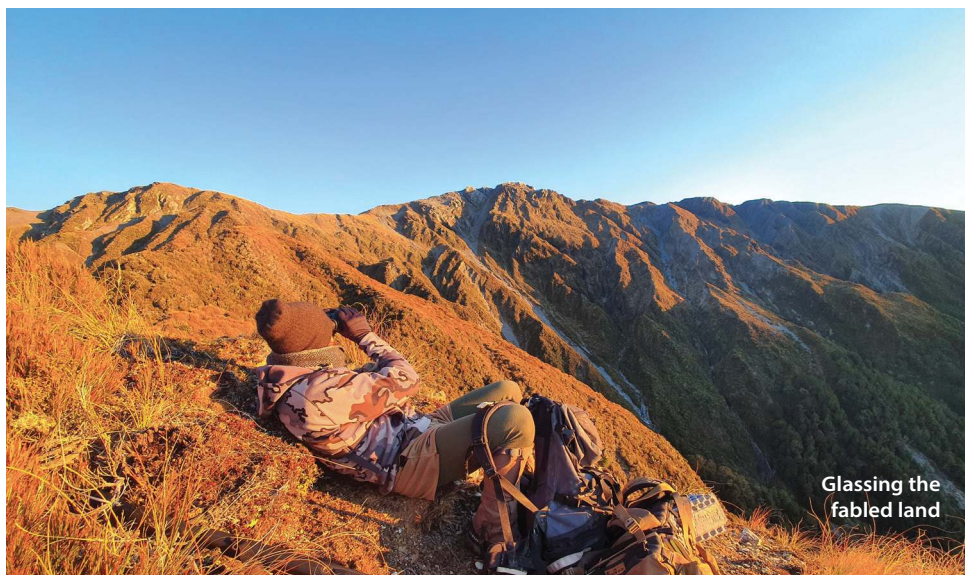
Hunting. Many of us have a certain view about using guides and that's understandable, however I was chasing knowledge as much as horn. I didn't grow up in a hunting family and didn't shoot a public land deer until my early 20s, and as keen as I was, in all honesty I wasn't much of a hunter. All that changed when Derrick Field took me under his wing in the Tararuas. Under Derrick's watch I went from shooting very few deer to being reasonably successful so I was hoping time in the seat with a professional tahr guide would yield similar results.

**Anyway, into the Landsborough.**

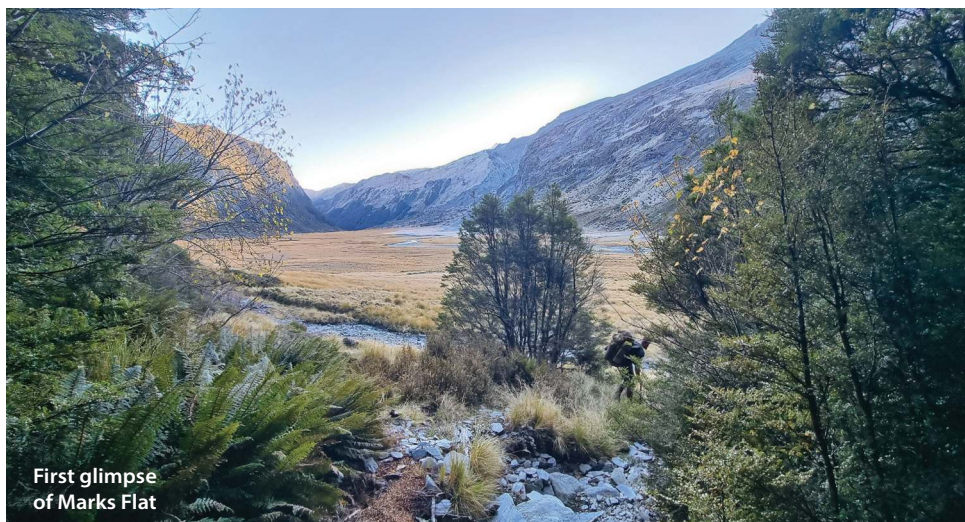
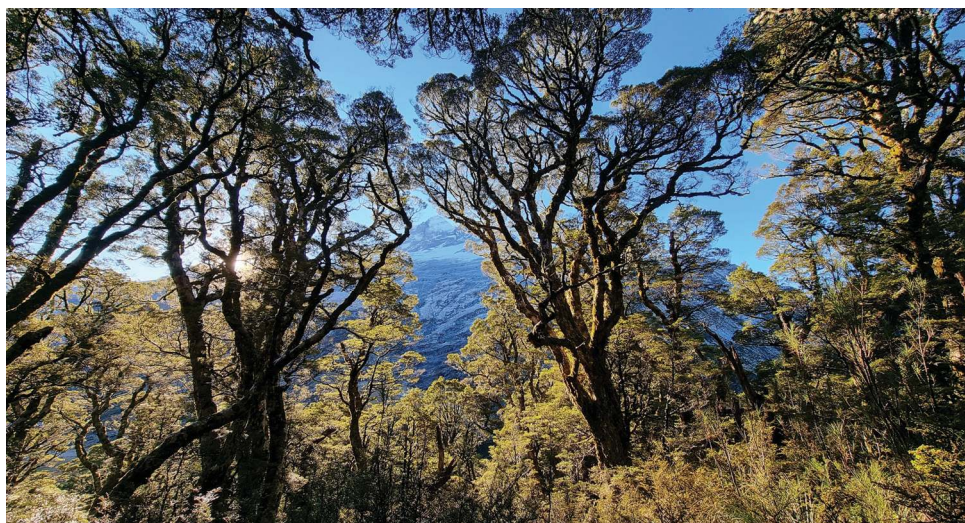
The trip started as any good trip should - in an 80 Series Cruiser followed by a ride with James Scott's crew. Upon landing Joe and I organised camp and Joe went about explaining the basics and pointing out a few of the locals. I guess we'll never know but we may well have seen the biggest bull that first evening. A short excursion saw us play cat and mouse with a chamois but no animals were harmed.



A reasonably cold night yielded a brilliant day and we moved along the range, Joe aging and talking me through tahr behaviour. Even post-cull we saw more than enough animals to keep us both interested and being a Tatarua hunter I had low expectations on numbers in any case. I just could not get my head around tahr parking up on a southern shaded face, even on a cold morning, whereas a deer would chase the sun! Joe was annoyingly good at spotting tahr, so much so that I'll admit to being a touch disgruntled, but on the other hand you'd expect it to be so given the man's profession. We picked our way over various faces before dropping through a stand of beech onto a huge flat which I understand had been an airstrip in times past.



Glassing the fabled land



First glimpse of Marks Flat

Having been on the move most of the day the rock biv was a welcome sight - and a first for this North Islander. The shelter came into its own that night as rain set in.

**The following morning we were up well before first light and were moving into the most technically challenging terrain I had hunted.**

While not 100% necessary an ice axe was bloody useful as we scaled rock and

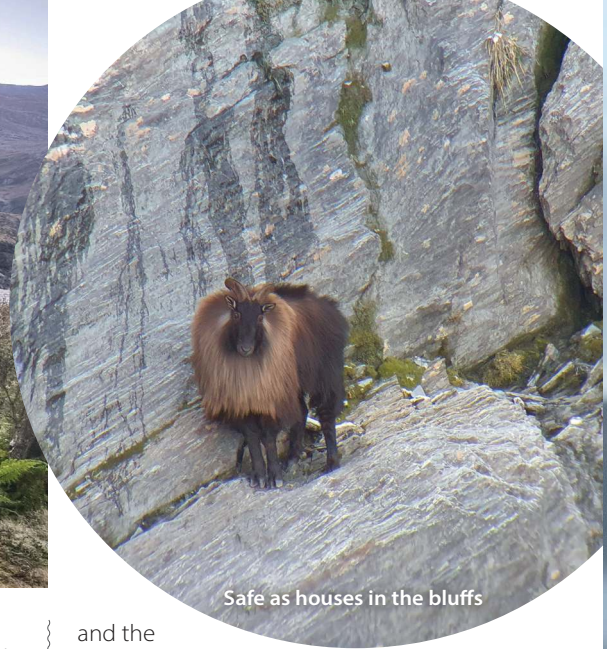
ice, eventually getting on to a mob of bulls. Actually, we saw very few nannies on the trip. **Over the course of an hour or two we played hide and seek, avoiding being seen until the mob disappeared over the rise and to who knows where.** We carefully made our way along the edge of a creek which fell steeply away before spotting what appeared to be one hell of a bull. Good glass in the way of a Swarovski spotting scope made a huge difference.





Rock Biv Hotel

We counted age ring by age ring before moving into a shootable position on the biggest of several bulls at a whopping 178 yards. **At the last moment I re-positioned about 30 yards along the edge of the creek and confused myself as there were now two bulls.**



Safe as houses in the bluffs

We had been watching one for long enough to think there was only the one. I almost let pride get the better of me and was going to shoot what I thought was the bigger of the two before buttoning off and seeking Joe's opinion. Bugger me - the unseen bull was the bigger of the two, and both over 13 inches.

I unleashed the 308 16 inch barrel Bush Pig and, as any decent North Islander would do, I made a clean shot, followed up by another just for good measure. **That's when the real work started.**

We had to descend back down the face until we could cross and begin the climb up an icy creek. There was no mistaking the beast even from 50 metres, the mane of the king of the mountain was visible and one hell of a mane it was. Unexpectedly it overshadowed the 13<sup>5/8</sup> inch horns,

and the sheer size of the animal took me completely by surprise. A real king of the mountain animal and everything one could have asked for. After a quick butchering session we returned for a second night at the rock biv.

The following day was a gentle stroll (yeah right) with heavy packs over what would constitute a small mountain range by any good North Islander's standards. Joe offered to shoulder the load of the cape but I was having none of that and opted for the heavier pack while he took the lighter skull. I had been running, swimming and walking up Mt Holdsworth a fair bit so was ready. By the time we got into our final camp along the banks of the Landsborough the Garmin watch said we'd been going 8:04:05hrs, so not gentle at all!

I took a huge amount away from the trip. I got to spend five nights with a fella who has 1000 days tahr hunting under his belt and I highly recommend engaging a guide. The horn was the glory but I feel like I got the equivalent of say 50 days hunting knowledge from five. **By no means am I some expert but feel I am now miles ahead and ready for when I return solo next time.**



13<sup>5/8</sup>" bull tahr





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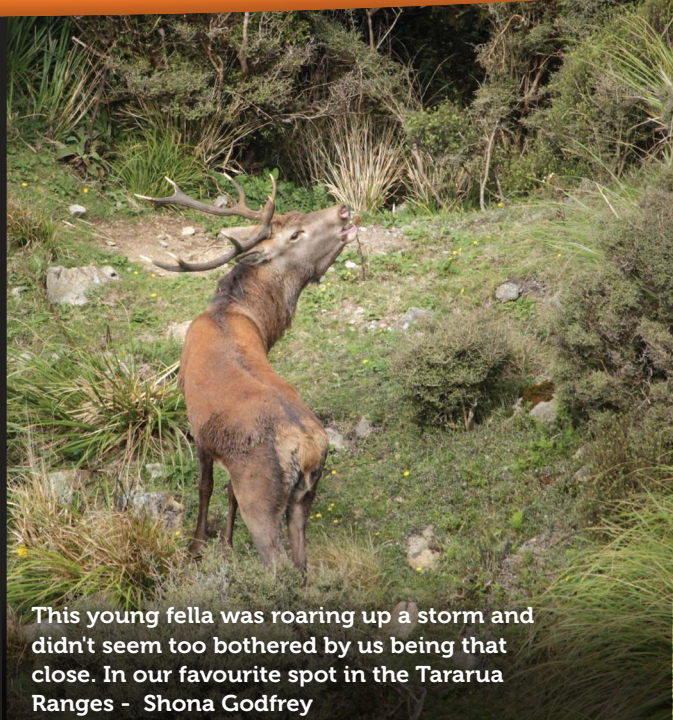


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Amber Terrill traded the rifle  
for the camera this roar



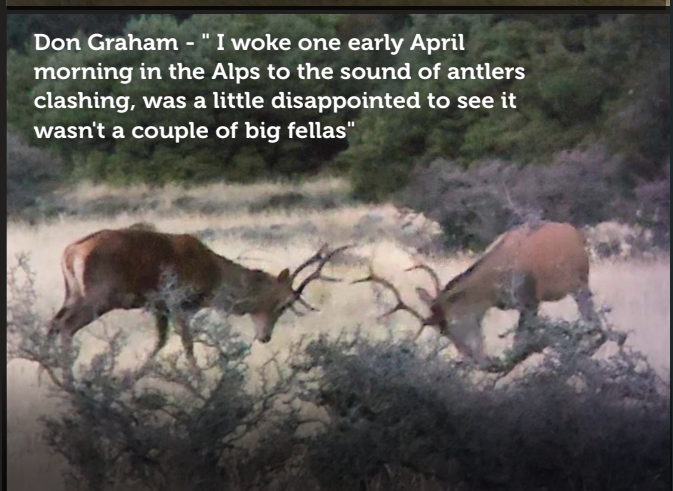
This young fella was roaring up a storm and  
didn't seem too bothered by us being that  
close. In our favourite spot in the Tatarua  
Ranges - Shona Godfrey



Richard Morton found this tired  
buck looking for a girlfriend



Blair Chamberlain caught this Otago  
Red stag roaring his heart out



Don Graham - "I woke one early April  
morning in the Alps to the sound of antlers  
clashing, was a little disappointed to see it  
wasn't a couple of big fellas"





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WRITTEN BY ~ CALEB ARCHER

# MANAHOU RUSA

**As part of the New Zealand brain drain, my family and I have moved to China. We keep a healthy love of the outdoors but we miss the beauty of wild New Zealand**

**So, when my long-time bush and diving buddy Daza suggested a mid-winter heli-hunt I jumped at the chance. My last hunting trip with him had been on his stag do and saw me bag two Sika and a 6lb trout, so I was happy to trust his nose to find us a good location.**

The Ureweras were chosen because we would likely get a hut to ourselves and maybe find some foolish deer hoping to warm themselves by our fire. This trip seemed to be blessed from the outset, as not only was Daza doing all the planning, but my Dad decided to join us.

With the help of the lads at Heli Hire in Murupara we loaded up and flew over the Galatea foothills into the wild. Flying in is a treat and even more so when you go from the manicured farmlands of Galatea straight up the scarred and waterfall-covered faces of the Ureweras and into Rusa country.

## Day 1.

**This was a double treat for Dad, as not only was he getting his first**

**chopper ride at age 70, but it was over the hunting grounds of his youth.** We followed the ridges into the Manahou right branch hut, which they assured us had not been visited recently and was unlikely to have anyone come in mid-week in the middle of winter. The pilot gave us a quick aerial orientation of the hunting grounds and pointing out five Rusa sunning themselves on the various slips at the end of the valley.

Suitably motivated for the cold river crossings ahead we dropped our gear at the hut and headed off, convinced that having flown into the middle of nowhere, the only deer we would see would be at those same slips an hours walk away, and that they would not be there tomorrow! So we were off up river with the grace and stealth of a herd of buffalo.

The first sign of our folly was when we walked straight past a spiker and saw him disappear up the hill, and then in our haste, missing a potential shot at a hind. **Unfortunately, as our high school teachers will testify, we are not quick learners** so when Daza walked around the river bend and found himself staring at a six-point stag he was only prepared to watch it bound off, leaving him with a great story. Dad was less impressed and reminded us that you can't eat stories. Suitably reprimanded we stopped walking and started hunting.

I think it is important to point out here that I am not a trophy hunter, but I am a conservationist. I hunt as an excuse to spend time in the outdoors. I admire that the Iwi have banned the use of 1080 in the Ureweras and are working with hunters to control deer populations without the collateral damage.

Quietly moving around a scree-covered bank, hopping from tree root to tree root to stop the shower of rocks from rolling to the river below, and just starting to feel the life of the bush around me, I heard the unmistakable sound of a hoof on rock. Slowly rounding the next little spur, I came across a young Rusa stag, oblivious to my presence and quite obviously



enjoying his afternoon snack. Closing the bolt, I only hesitated a second, thinking of Daza and Dad moving up the riverbed below me, before I dispatched him. His last act upon the boom of the fabulous Husqvarna .270 my father-in-law had given me was to roll down the bank straight past me, and come to rest conveniently on the flats below. My pleasure at getting on the board was further enhanced by the smart-arsed comments from my companions. They did declare however, that the benefit of me shooting a small stag is that I could carry it by myself, and with that we headed back to the hut to rustle up some firewood before the frost set in.

## Day 2.

**With a beautiful frost, the mercury hiding at -6°C and the hut water tank tap frozen solid it was tough to get out of bed in the morning.** My shoulders were still feeling the carry from last night but when your father gets the billy boiling it does not matter how old you are, you get out of bed and make him a cuppa.

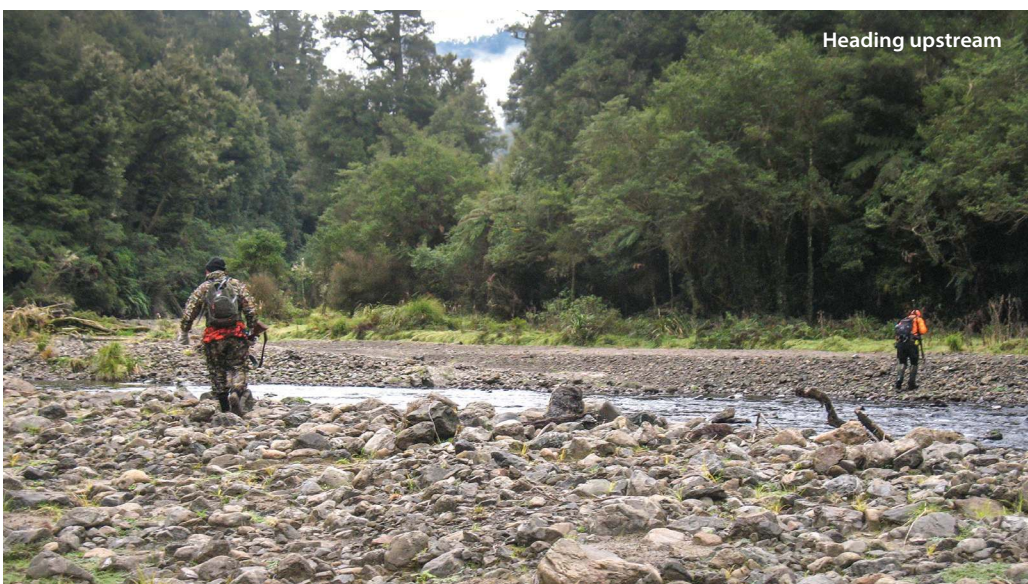
Having already got on the board I gave Daza and Dad the pick of hunting spots, Daza opting to take the flats above the hut and Dad the river. After studying the map and the Google Earth pictures we had with us, I determined that the slips we saw flying in were probably not visible from the valley floor, so decided to go exploring and come down on them from above. After sharing the first few river crossings with Dad, we wished each other well, did a radio check on the little bush radios we carried and I was off. My path carried me up an old ridge track marked with white tin markers, which wound from the ponga and kānuka filled flats, through whitey-wood up to mature beech which crunched like cornflakes underfoot. Even at this height the gullies were filled with ponga, and reminded me of why I love wild New Zealand. I took an early lunch and watched small kakariki glide below me as I sat on a fallen mature beech tree which stuck out over the valley.

**It was about now that the wind decided to mess with my carefully laid plans and do a 180° turn.**

Fortunately I was still on the ridge, so was able to continue well past any possible slip locations before dropping down to come back to them. Another beautiful hour later, with the sun streaming through the canopy I began my approach at what I believed was slip level. Forty minutes of 'step, stop, listen' later and I was able to crawl over the final spur and peer onto a beautiful sun-soaked slip face. Wearing my new 3D camouflage, I felt



Daza, Dad and I at our home for the week



Heading upstream

comfortable cosying up to a little stand of kānuka which would give me a good view over the slip. Getting into place I had barely begun to scan the clumps of bush on the slip when a big gust of wind swirled straight against my right cheek and down to the valley below. Seconds later I heard crashing about 80 metres below me that let me know at least one Red had winded me and had decided to leave. The crashing continued long enough for me to be able to track the progress of my spooked quarry as it moved across the slip below me, hidden from view by a band of bush and with a dash of pure luck, gave me a glimpse of the biggest Red I have ever seen. It was as close to the size of a horse as any deer I have seen and was covered in enough pearly antler tips to make counting impossible as it bounded through a gap in the trees 150 metres across the valley. I raised my scope and for a split second saw two rumps. While the first belonging to the Red disappeared the second jumped up from where it was resting, almost trampled by the Red as it went

by and did a few confused turns before walking directly uphill and out of sight in the thick scrub. From my seated position I was able to rest my rifle on my knee and try to predict the path of the second deer. **I was happy to see a clearing along the 'path of least resistance' from the thick patch of scrub back into the bush proper.** Keeping my rifle poised I tried to watch the clearing and three other possible exits, knowing that the deer could also stay under cover and never be seen again, and any movement from me in my semi-exposed position would give me away. A few seconds later a flash indicated I was correct with my first guess, a head and shoulders appeared, but as I closed the bolt and lowered my eye to the scope the stag turned a sharp left and started skirting the clearing, as if he knew that he was being watched. I followed his movements as he passed behind scrub and ponga stands and was rewarded with a clear view of his front half as he emerged, no more than 150 metres away. The Husqvarna boomed again and though the kick of the .270





I was unaware that Rusa only typically have six points and that the stag I shot was a nice trophy. I have learnt a lot since then and found that it scored 143 DS



Now, if you have never shot a Rusa before you'll have not experienced the knife blunting effect of their armour-like skin. It is miserable to say the least and it put my trusty Gerber blade to the test. I have shot larger Reds than this stag but possibly not heavier. **With the**

balanced on my knee meant I lost sight of stag, I was rewarded with a good amount of crashing and tree shaking ten metres below his earlier position, then silence. **Remembering a lesson from Dad, I sat tight and took in the beauty of the day.** Though the forest had frozen when my unsuppressed rifle boomed, the birds were now starting to flit and move from tree to tree. The sun blazed down and the chill of the frosty morning was long forgotten.

Five minutes later, because I am patient, but not a saint, I started to carefully move across the slip to where the stag stood when I placed the shot. But as I neared the spot a rustle turned my head and I saw the stag up against the last bush I saw shake - he spotted me and raised his head looking as if he would try to stand. The split second it took to work my bolt and raise the rifle to my shoulder saw a round sent cleanly through his neck and him rolling down the slip below me. **When I finally caught up with him, he turned out to be a nice six-point Rusa stag, my second of the trip and first one really worthy of mention.**

**evening setting in I decided to drag it further down the slip and ended up slinging it off a small bank so I could work on it from below.** Very tired, bloody and with the sun setting I decided to let the cool night air do its best and come back for the meat in the morning.

When I returned to the hut there were 'one that got away' stories to rival my own King of the Forest Red stag story, and a few hairy moments for Daza when he found a slip by sliding right onto it, and down it! Showing my Rusa ignorance I just told the others what I had learnt of the slips and that I got a young stag and left it at that.

### Day 3.

**We all slept well and it was not until sunrise and while I was trying to convince Dad that the 22 river crossings were worth it to help me dress and carry the stag that I thought to show them a picture of it.** That sealed the deal, and I was unaware that Rusa only get to six points and that the stag I had shot was a nice

trophy. I have learnt a lot since then and found that it scored 143 DS. This day was as much about enjoying time in the bush with my father as anything else. I have been blessed with both a Dad and father-in-law who love hunting and fishing and I seldom go out with either of them without learning a thing or two. Today was no different and will be one I remember for a long time. I also poked my nose a bit further up river, just because I am a curious fella, and found amazing sign and beautiful slopes that would wait for another day.

As we worked, we heard a chopper come over and as bad weather was coming, headed back laden with venison expecting to find an updated pick-up time pinned to the door. What we found instead were three more hunters. Fortunately they were good sorts who had, like me, graduated from Tauranga Boys College, a source of true gentlemen, and just the type of guys you hope hut mates would be. Just to emphasise the point, rather than head off for a hunt without knowing where we were, they had split the firewood we gathered, put the kettle on and had a pack of ginger nuts ready for us when we came in.

Some pearls of wisdom emerged over the next few nights that deserve noting for their pure simplicity:

1. Deer are not trying to be quiet, they are trying to be deer – they just are quiet
2. Be patient, you are walking through paradise, so what's the hurry?
3. Hunt where the deer are, not where you think they should be. As a species they may have certain habits, but individually they can be totally unpredictable
4. Treat every step in the bush as a totally new view
5. Don't look for deer, look for movement. But remember it's what the deer are looking for as well.
6. Always put safety first and don't let your map reading or bushcraft skills get rusty, even if you carry a fancy GPS
7. Scent control is everything

Now I am a real stickler on this last point. I wash everything I have in unscented and non-UV enhanced soaps and I take my clothes off and hang them outside the hut to avoid the hut smoke and cooking smells. It makes for a cold morning getting dressed (especially when your pants freeze solid) but worth it. I also use



a deer scent stick when I put on fresh clothes. After applying it liberally to my shoulders and hat the next morning we all headed out together, breaking off into our hunting zones. Daza got a laugh when one of the new boys stopped suddenly while following us and called us back. Smell that he said "a stag was here, his scent is thick, he must have just been past". Seeing no tracks or sign I tell him to give me a sniff. My shirt has now carried two stags and been topped up with a scent stick. The look on his face when he realised he had just caught a whiff of me was hilarious, but also a reminder it was time for a wash and a fresh set of clothes.

#### Day 4.

**Our fourth day was spent discovering all the places the deer were not.** Most people saw or spooked something while I was left chasing shadows, without so much as a rustle or glimpse of anything. But there is never a bad day in the bush and I could feel the peacefulness recharging me after being drained all year in the hustle and bustle of Beijing.

The following day Dad had decided to leave us young fellas to roam the hills and hunt the slope directly opposite the hut where he had seen good sign the evening before. I suggested that the new boys find the sign I had seen previously in the uncharted territory past the slips – which they did, bringing back a six point Red and a spiker, leaving Daza and I to explore a side creek. Now Daza is a real country boy, and has always hunted in the prerequisite stubbies, with a set of thermals underneath in extreme cold. The Kaimais are famous for the supplejack but the Ureweras are equally, in my view, famous for stinging nettle. Though Daza's legs seem impervious to cold they are not impervious to stinging nettle and our valley was covered in it. We discovered that if you are stung when cold the stinging seems to stop quite quickly but starts again as soon as you warm up back at the hut, and can annoy you all night!

The side creek was not chosen by accident and there was a large slip face we were hoping to reach before the forecasted rain set in. Taking the lead around the bend, I was walking quietly along the side of the valley looking up under the tree and ponga lined slopes, when Daza called out. I turned around to see him raising his rifle so I immediately dropped to a knee so he could have a clear shot at whatever he had seen up the valley. A second later I heard a bolt working, but another second later I am still hearing the bolt working. A glance backwards showed Daza with his rifle lowered fighting with the bolt. I looked

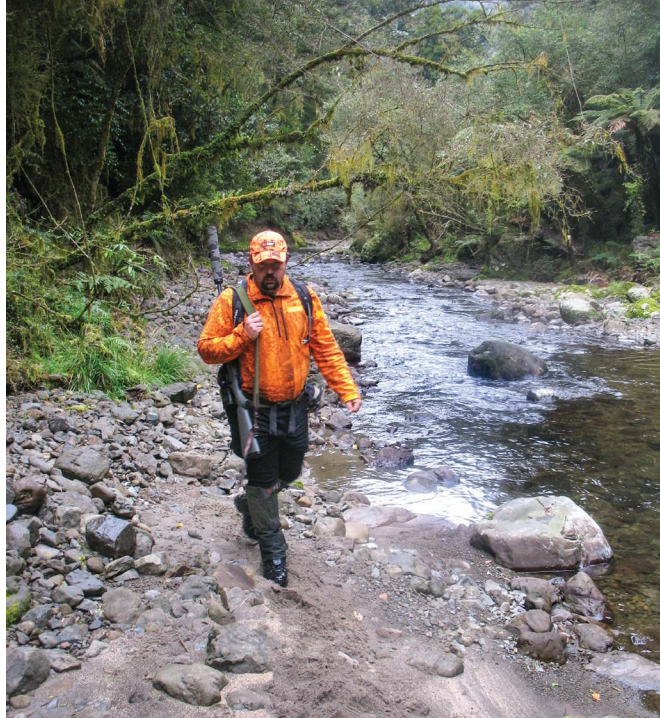
forward again just in time to see a beautiful Red spiker jump out from behind a scree bank less than four metres in front of me. As it landed it paused for a split second, and hearing another series of frustrated actions behind me I closed my bolt, raised, and fired right as he took the next jump which would have taken him off and away. The boom of the Husqvarna made my ears ring as it bounced off the valley walls, but the spiker dropped where his bound ended without so much as a twitch. Satisfied I turned to look back at Daza and asked what the story was. He had seen the spiker's rump while it was totally hidden from me. A few more steps and I would have literally come face to face with it.

Gutting and hanging this spiker was a dream compared with the Rusa so I made short work of it, Daza insisting I do the dirty work. Then, with a light rain settling in, we put our jackets on, left the spiker hanging and continued up the valley, with him in the lead.

The rest of the day was a lesson in getting back to basics as we spooked two animals. We never dreamed they would be so close to where we had just shot our spiker and chatted for ten minutes while I cleaned it, but they were. We headed back to the spiker as quickly as we could but still enjoyed a wet walk home in the dark, but with the company of a good mate, I wouldn't have it any other way. Thanks to the little radios I carried we could also let Dad know we were safe and sound.

#### Day 5.

**The next day's consistent rain saw a few of the boys take a hut day while Dad and I headed upriver in case it cleared and the deer moved onto the faces.** I had found a beautiful view spot for a newly discovered face and was eager to show him. Three hours of sitting still in the cold winter rain and Dad and I were both remembering why we loved bush stalking more than sitting, but with the best of the day gone we decided to head back to the hut. On the way I radioed Daza and suggested walking downriver, wind at our backs, just to see what was there. He politely declined but came out of the hut to wave as I walked past. The walk down river was uneventful and I turned back planning to arrive at the hut right on dark. Just below the hut I had passed a fresh slip, cut like a scar through the forest close to 200 metres



long and less than 50 metres wide. The exposed wet rock glistened and fresh grass lined the sides. As I had made good time I decided to watch this slip until dark. Approaching cautiously through the ponga stands on the opposite bank I found a nice spot to wait out the day.

As mentioned previously I am patient, but I am no saint, so less than ten minutes later my itchy feet were ready to head home. I stubbornly decided to wait a further ten minutes and said a silent prayer. I don't know if you are religious, or if you are, if you even believe in praying for deer - it might be cheating. It went like this, "well God, it's been a long day. If you want to just give me a deer now is a good time. After this I am headed back to the hut and it is getting late, so yep, now is a good time." Being practical, I also resolved to glass the whole slip, as although God may give me a deer I doubt he would put neon lights on it. Checking out every brown ponga frond that may be a deer, a movement caught my eye. A tail was flicking behind a tree on the edge of the slip. A moment later a mature Red hind stepped out 60 metres above me, and a few moments later was in full view. The Husqvarna again did its work, and sending a silent thank you skywards.

Again, taking stock before getting down to business, I realised the rain had stopped and the wood pigeons were flying high in the canopy. It was a surreal scene, quite beautiful. Just to top it off I radioed Daza and he walked straight down (in his underwear) with a pack on to help me carry the meat back before dark. What a good mate! Truly a blessed trip, but not over yet.

#### Day 6.

**Having been blessed with four deer, and a meat safe which was straining**



**under the load, I was happy to just support Daza with some good company.** He was keen to head up where the boys had shot their two deer earlier as they swore there was good sign everywhere up there and they were planning on stalking the thick gullies close to the hut. So setting off bright and early we made good time getting to the creek junction where we planned to start our hunt.

I headed up the bank for the grassy bowls that look like promising hangouts for deer and Daza was off like a shot around the base of the hill. Moving around slowly the bush was beautifully open and the little gullies filled with ponga. The damp ground made my progress almost silent. During a stop trying to see under a thick stand of ponga, a shaking branch caught my eye. Taking a seat I waited to see if it was just a bird taking off or something more. A few seconds later a branch

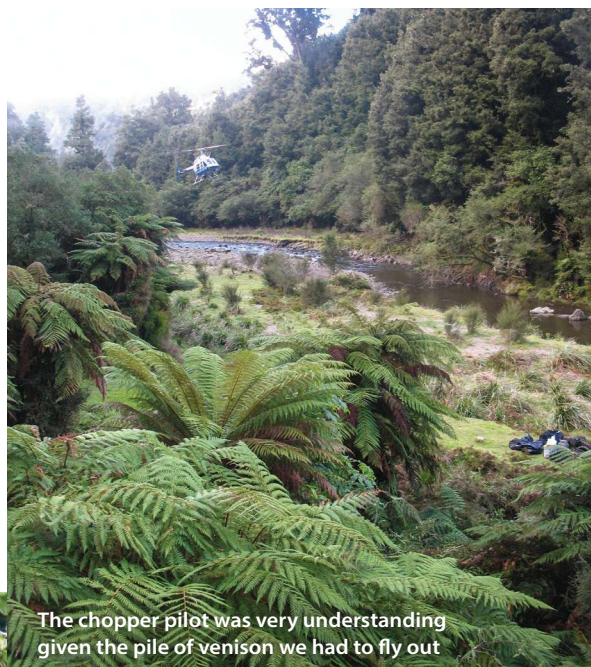
moved sideways and pinged back. Just below my line of sight over the next little spur, less than 40 metres away there had to be a deer feeding. I waited longer then saw an antler pop up and shake as leaves were pulled of the tree, then I saw a head. A smaller six point Rusa stag was looking around alertly. Frozen in place I felt the urge to take a head shot through the small branches. At this range any sound would give me away and with his head going up and down any movement was a risk. Closing the bolt I lined up where I expected his head to come up, but it never did and the tree ceased shaking. Seizing the moment, I dropped back, planning to move up higher and across to the spur he was on and get a shot down at him. I started moving but found myself surrounded by noisy crown ferns. There was no way I could quickly move uphill without being heard. I headed back to find a new, and more direct, route.

coming straight across towards me. If it was to come past the next line of ponga – less than 20 metres from me – then I would look for a shot, but getting a clean one was going to be challenging as it was moving around the back of the stand and would soon drop into the thickest and darkest part. Holding my breath I found it in the scope and tried to watch both the animal and the spur, hoping the stag would present himself. But when it rounded the top of the stand and put its head down to feed less than 30 metres in front of me, I got my first look at 'her' head and the six small points on top of it. Bolt closed and as he raised his head, it was job done.

## Day 7.

**To the chopper pilots' credit he flinched only slightly at the 130+ kilograms of venison we had ready to go.** It was a full bird that took off and three tired but satisfied hunters who enjoyed a hot pie at the Murupara bakery before heading home. Despite the cool river crossings, and sore shoulders, it was a trip filled with great memories which are even better because they are shared with my Dad and good mate Daza. I definitely recommend winter hunting to anyone not concerned with getting a tan, and who is comfortable taking what the New Zealand outdoors can throw at you.

I have enjoyed some good New Zealand hunting and have shot Fallow, Whitetail, Red, Sika and now Rusa – one of the most challenging and elusive species I have ever hunted. The only ones that have yet to cross my path are Wapiti and Sambar. **Needless to say, I am already talking to Daza about our next trip.**



The chopper pilot was very understanding given the pile of venison we had to fly out



I crawled up onto the spur and started scanning the area to see if I could locate the stag. If I couldn't, my assumption was that he was still on the other side of the next spur, and I would be free to move. Scanning through the ponga stand I saw movement, and in the shadows I made out a set of legs. My heart sank as it looked like a small hind, but with a six-point stag just over the spur one move and this 'hind' would bust me. The animal was walking behind the ponga so I could only see the flash of legs with the body and head hidden behind the fronds, but it was



Dad at the hut



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WRITTEN BY ~ TIM BUTCHER | POINTS SOUTH

# HOW BIG IS THAT BULL?

**No doubt if you have an interest in the hunting scene in New Zealand you will, like me, follow a wide variety of media on the subject**

Over the past few years I have noticed that there are consistently better “trophy” animals being harvested. Now this could be because of the influx of ways to communicate your hunting success - I mean if you didn't put it on Facebook, did you even shoot a bull?

It's now far easier to keep track of who is shooting what and where because of the photos that get published, and it's easy to judge the quality rather than the old mate at the pub telling you that Bruce from down the way shot a bloody massive bull the other day. There are actually very few people I trust when they tell me they saw a good animal (maybe I'm just getting picky) but photos don't usually lie.

**Another reason may be that hunters are becoming better educated on what they should be shooting and when.** There will always be the school of thought that “I only hunt for meat, I don't care what I shoot”. I'm not disagreeing with this as I hunt for meat very regularly, but every time I pull the trigger I know

exactly what I'm shooting. How many times have you heard about people shooting an animal only to find that, when they walk up to it, it wasn't what they expected? In my view, this should not happen. **There's not really an excuse for shooting a hind that has a fawn at foot or a velvet stag that's showing great potential.**

The media may have helped in this regard with hunter education. The pictures of good animals, and by good animals I mean quality trophies, may have helped everyone know what they need to look for and what they should avoid. You will also see a lot of negativity if a person has harvested an animal people believe they should not have. There have been some

absolutely brilliant stags, bulls and bucks coming from public land. They are big, heavy and, above all else, mature. **Being able to assess whether an animal is in the correct age class is quite important.** To be able to do this, you need to have some knowledge about what to look for and a way to correctly assess them before pulling the trigger. Spotting scopes are essential.

Here's a quick yet certainly not exhaustive summary of what I look for in a bull tahr.







Tim Norris with a very old 13"+ bull



A 12 3/4" bull. This is an example of smaller bases. He appears possibly bigger when you use the "two square method" so this is why the head-horn length comparison is useful.

Many people will do it differently and will get the same result.

Tahr are not easy to judge, not like trying to tell a good stag from an average one. But when you're talking only a couple of inches between a representative and a monster, you really need to know what to look for. **To compound the problem in the rut a bull's mane is often covering the tips of its horns.** When they are posturing you can barely see them! This is when you need to play the waiting game. Put the spotter on him and watch until you get all the angles of view on those horns to make a proper assessment. Get in close enough and you can count the age rings. Mature bulls are eight years old and over.

You'll need both a side view and a front on view. The front on view is going to give you a view of the width and sweep. If the tips don't look like they sweep in and point back inwards, chances are he's only going to be an 11" or so. **You will also be able to see the condition of the tips and whether they are broomed or broken.** Bulls vary in the width of their horns but the wider ones tend

to be longer as well.

As for the side view, again you can see the condition of the tips as well as the overall length of the horn. One method I use is to take the width across the base and make a square on the horn (see the picture and it will make sense). If you can fit nearly two of those squares on the horn before it starts to curl and taper, it's likely a good size and has maturity.

Another method is to compare

the overall length of the horn to the overall length of the skull. On a big bull, they will be similar. The bases are another factor. If they look small they probably are. Don't get caught out by small bases which seem to make the horns seem bigger. This is where the skull length comparison is great.

A great comparison of three good bulls. 1 is 12 3/4", 2 is 14" and 3 is 12 1/2". This shows how sweep and mass make all the difference in the overall length







A great 14" bull where you can see how the "two square method" can be used. From the base the horn extends almost twice as far as the width of the base before it begins to taper.



A young bull with barely any mane to his cape



A middle-aged herd bull with the beginnings of a mane



A truly mature bull with a mane that extends behind his shoulders. Also note the heavily broomed tips

The coat of a bull also helps to determine his age, as a mature bull will have a mane (we're talking winter hunting here) that will appear to reach back  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way down his body. Long and pronounced dorsal stripes can be a good indicator too. I wouldn't get too hung up on the colour of manes as an indicator. I've seen big bulls that were just completely black but for some people, a bull tahr coat is the real trophy and there's nothing wrong with that. **In the spring and summer the coat doesn't get in the way so it's far easier to do a horn assessment.**

If all these factors are present, you're likely looking at a 13"+ bull.

As with stags, you can get character trophies too. A really old broomed bull with stacked growth rings is nearly as good and maybe more interesting than a really long one (exception being if its old and long!). One of the oldest bulls I have seen was 13 years old but only 11". **The difference to all the other 11" bulls that get shot is that the fella who shot it knew exactly what he had pointed the rifle at.** A one-horned bull is another example. I've seen a few of these and my guess is it is because they have taken a fall at some

time in their life.

Those are the things I'm looking for when I'm after a trophy animal (for these species anyway). It's fair to say that after a while looking at any of these animals the old saying "you'll know a big one when you see it" definitely applies.

The hunting resource that we have in New Zealand is pretty fantastic. There's always people bagging the way our game animals are managed and to be honest, you could say many of them have suffered from mismanagement. It's easy to blame government agencies here and rightly so, but also some hunters are to blame as well. **The old "kiwi bomb up" often rears its ugly head. Everything gets shot, and who cares what it is. Measure it on the ground.**

I recall a group of tahr hunters I spoke to not so long ago. When I asked how they got on the response was "Na no good, didn't see any good bulls." I then asked if they shot anything. **"Yea we shot eight bulls but nothing over 11 inches."** To say I was stunned was a bit of an understatement. How could you possibly expect to ever see a good bull if you are going to shoot all the immature ones? Time and time again it's the same with hunts in the roar. Someone shoots a young six or an eight then complains they didn't see a big one. **They just won't ever get big if you shoot them when they are immature!** Things may change in terms of hunting and animal management in the near future so I look forward to seeing what happens. Getting into that topic is a whole other kettle of fish!

As hunters we all share a passion for the game we hunt. While we may have differing views, we all want a sustainable herd that allows us to go out and harvest what we are after, whether that is a monster stag or a fat little yearling. If we all understand what others are after we can make sure we continue to see 40" stags, 14" bulls, 10" bucks and at the same time have freezers full of high quality meat. I recall a slogan of sorts from Cam Speedy "Let him grow, take the doe". I think his game management presentation for the Sika Foundation is fantastic, and it's also applicable to all our big game species. **It covers a variety of topics including how to manage animals in order to achieve specific herd characteristics and age classes. Please check it out on their**



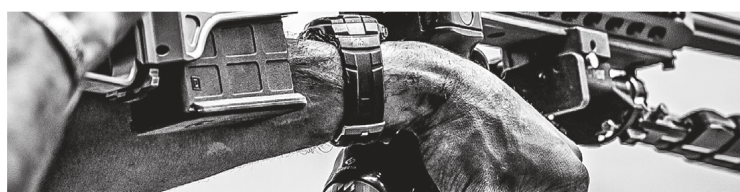
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# A TALE OF SURVIVAL THINGS A HUNTER MUST KNOW PART THREE

WRITTEN BY ~ MIKE SPRAY

New Zealand Herald 27 November 2006

## Missing hunter spends fourth night missing in ranges

Police are still confident of finding alive a Northland hunter after his fourth night lost in the Kaimanawa Ranges.

Andreas Thirling, 50, from Ruakaka, went on a solo hunt for deer in the Waipakihi River Valley on Thursday morning and failed to return that night.

Senior Constable Barry Shepherd said conditions in the ranges

had been mild and "all is not lost".

"It's been a bit cold at night, but the weather's not been too bad.

"We're being realistic though," Mr Shepherd said.

This morning dog handlers were joining 11 search and rescue teams, which stayed in the area overnight.

Mr Thirling was described as an inexperienced hunter who was not familiar with the rugged terrain.

The difficulty of the terrain made the geographical size of the search academic, Mr Shepherd said.

"It could be a square kilometre and you could still miss him."

## Andreas walked out of the Kaimanawa high country on day five after having endured a journey of emotion, determination and survival

**In 2007, a few months after Andreas had recovered, I met with him and his wife, Christine and heard first-hand the extraordinary tale of survival.**

The experience for both was still very raw and understandably emotional, and to relive aspects was difficult. **However, Andreas really wanted his story told so that other hunters could learn and benefit** from his five days

experience of survival. He acknowledged that some of the decisions he made, with the benefit of hindsight, he would now do differently, but in order to survive in that rugged and unforgiving country in freezing night-time conditions, Andreas took great care of himself and survived.

He left his bivvy camp in the Waipakihi River on the last day of the trip for an early morning hunt. It was going to be a short hunt as he had to be back, packed and ready to walk out with his mates around midday. As he left camp, full of

expectation with morning frost still on the ground, little did he know that by midday he would be lost and that five days later he would eventually walk out of the Kaimanawas.

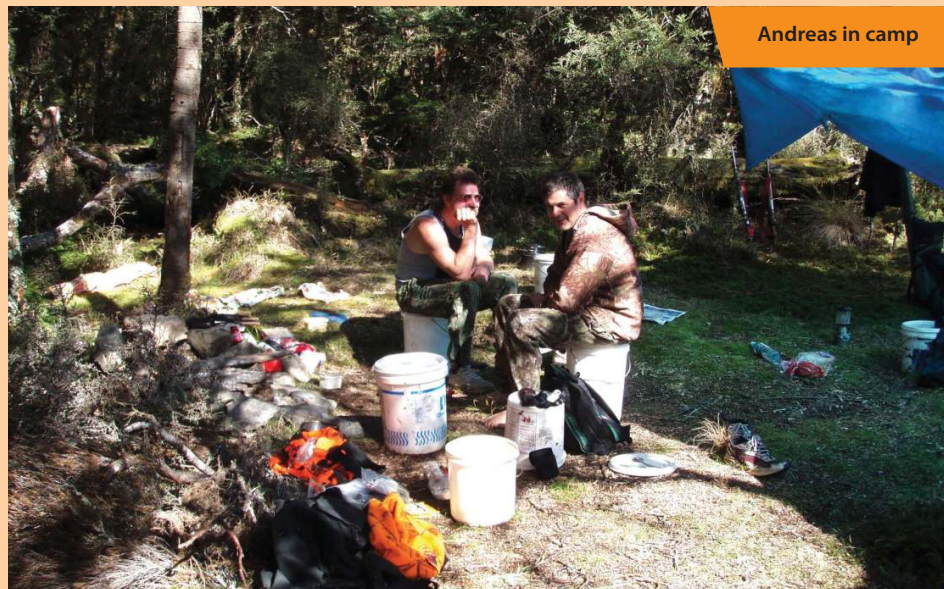
**Andreas's tale contains many lessons of survival.** The post analysis of his ordeal is revealing and reinforces the necessity to have good knowledge of survival principles and to prepare well for the time when things do go wrong.

When he became lost it began with gradual confusion and disorientation and this soon led him to accept that he had no idea where he was or which direction to go. Some of you may well relate to this. It can be scary and, if not controlled, can lead to a feeling of panic where there

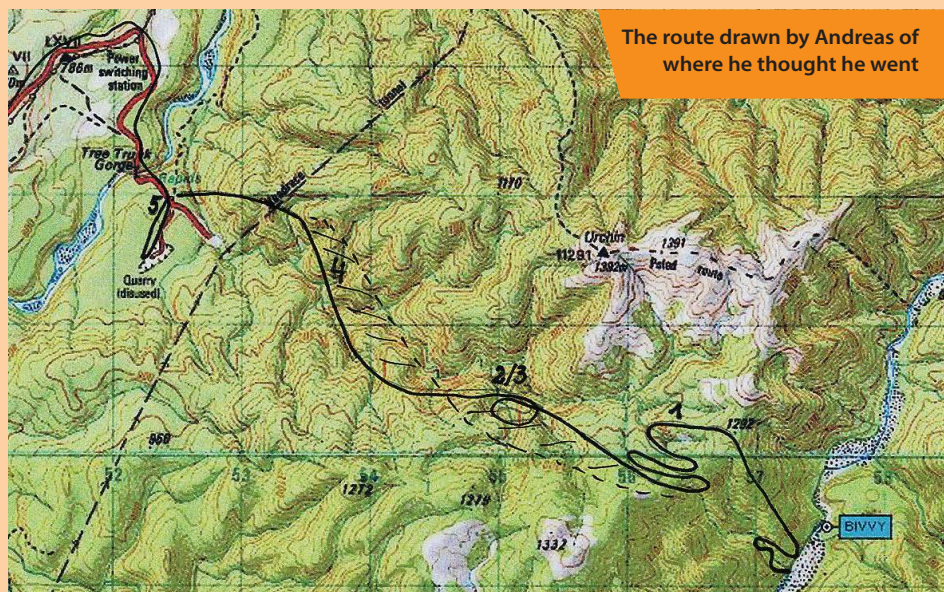




Kaimanawa country near where Andreas became lost



Andreas in camp



The route drawn by Andreas of where he thought he went

is the potential for your decisions to be illogical and imprudent. This can result in your situation becoming much worse.

At this point it is vitally important to STOP and think about your situation and what your best options might be. Andreas thought hard about his predicament, and decided to walk out. **Before talking about this decision let me share with you the STAR process.**

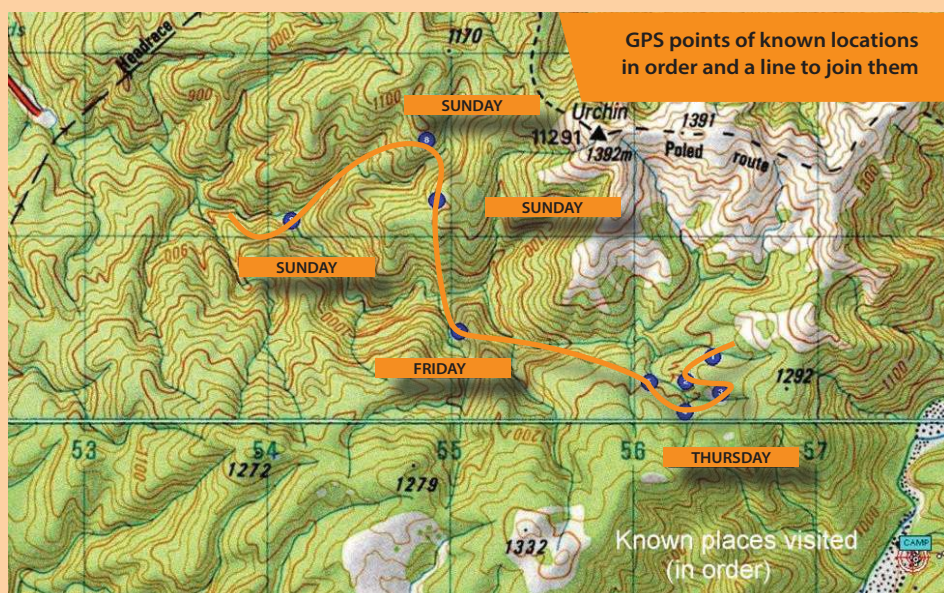
Using the acronym STAR will lead you through an assessment of your situation and the formulation of a plan going forward. If you get to the time where you know things have gone wrong and you feel even a little bit anxious, that is the time to apply **STAR**.

**STOP:** This is often the hardest thing to do but it is very important. You must stop, sit down, and stay calm.

**THINK:** Think about your situation. What is around you? What equipment and emergency supplies do you have? What is the weather doing? How you are feeling physically?

**ASSESS:** Assess your options based on your above thinking. Which option will give you the best chance of survival?

**RESPOND:** Put into place your plan of action. Your response will determine the outcome.



GPS points of known locations in order and a line to join them

Known places visited (in order)

As mentioned above, Andreas decided to walk out. Having assessed his situation, he thought it the best option. Some may think it was unwise, as staying put in the vicinity will give searchers the best chance of finding you.

If you walk a day or two from where you became lost the search area becomes so large that your chances of being found are significantly reduced. **Never-the-less Andreas made his decision and stuck to it.**





Building shelters with the kids is a great bit of fun, but could give them crucial skills for the future too

He carried a GPS, compass, water bottle, spare clothing, food and a fire lighter in his day pack. He appeared well equipped should he get disorientated or have to spend a night out. Early on in the hunt, Andreas realised he had lost his compass from the pocket of his pack, so now it was down to his GPS only for navigation. Once Andreas became disorientated about his location and direction of travel, he used his GPS but in the cold conditions the batteries lost their power quickly and rewarming them was only a short fix. Andreas did not carry spare batteries although he did try the batteries from his camera, but these soon failed

as well. This left Andreas with no navigation tools. He did not carry a map as on previous trips his GPS had always got him back to camp. The message here is never to rely solely on electronic navigation devices including a GPS or smart phone. Reading a map and using a compass to find a direction of travel remains the most reliable and dependable means of navigation.

## ESSENTIAL NEEDS FOR SURVIVAL

**There are four essential survival needs. If one or more is neglected your chances of surviving decrease to the extent where death can result in a very short time.**

The four essential needs are:

### 1. SHELTER

**Which will provide protection from the elements.** This is perhaps your most immediate need as exposure to wind chill, rain and snow can drain your core body temperature rapidly leading

to exposure and survival for only a matter of hours.

On the four nights Andreas was lost he stopped well before dark, finding a suitable place to camp. He built a shelter with branches and fern fronds and additional fronds for his sleeping pad to insulate him from the cold ground. This gave him the best chance of protection from the cold nights.

Finding a dry spot away from the valley floor where cold air sits and taking a survival blanket or even a light emergency fly in you day pack will help hugely when it comes time to prepare for an unexpected night out.

### 2. WARMTH.

**Every night Andreas built a fire.**

Each day while walking he would collect dry sticks and put them in his pocket to use later as kindling to light the fire. He collected sufficient dry wood to keep his fire going throughout the night. He had a lighter in his pack and taking this small article of survival equipment proved so critical to his survival. A fire kept him warm and enabled him to dry damp clothing and socks, so he had dry clothes for the morning.

Finding dry firewood can be challenging in New Zealand's wet bush environments. One option is to look for fallen dead branches hung up in trees. These have been wind dried and are likely to burn sufficiently well to provide a reliable and lasting fire. Sundried wood that is found on a stony river bench will also likely burn well. Carry some sort of fire lighting aid. A piece of rubber tyre tube is great as it will light if wet, burns very hot and will last sufficient time to ignite the fire. Other efficient aids include a candle or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

### 3. WATER

**Is our life blood and without it we will only survive for a couple of days.** Water enables our body to function normally, and it will keep our brains healthy and alert. To make important and sensible decisions we need a healthy brain.

Andreas decided early on that he would rest and drink water every twenty minutes. He carried a 750ml water bottle and at every opportunity he would top up his bottle. Never once in his five-day ordeal did his water bottle run dry.



Emergency shelter and fire



This was a very good strategy and one that contributed significantly to his survival.

It is too easy to neglect drinking water. We need at least three litres of water a day when exercising and drinking small amounts regularly, as Andreas did, is the most effective way of staying hydrated. If you are lost or injured, make sure you always have easy access to water.

#### 4. THE WILL TO SURVIVE.

**Your mind is your greatest survival tool and those who have survived against the odds have prepared themselves mentally.**

Andreas credits his survival in part to training received while in the German Army. Not only skills training but mental preparedness for situations where fear, anger and emotion could control the mind. He had an intense determination and a will to survive that enabled him to walk out as he planned. His wife Christine consumed his thoughts, and this became a huge motivating factor to survive as he was determined to see her again.

Give-up-itis is a term given to those who lose the will to survive. It can be bought on by dehydration and long exposure to cold. The fact that Andreas stayed warm at night and hydrated during the day minimised the potential for give-up-itis.

The outcome of get-home-itis can be catastrophic and lead to death. For example, do I cross a swollen and dangerous river to get home or control the determination and wait it out until the river is safe to cross?

Determination must be calculated, and it must contribute positively to survival. It is OK to be determined to survive.



A fire is a crucial survival tool. Always carry the means to light one, and practice

Andreas survived on one muesli bar which was carefully rationed for a small daily nibble. He did try and eat plant material including fern fronds and leaves, but these aggravated his throat to a burning sensation, and it made him lose his voice. Food is not essential for survival in the first few days. It is difficult to find palatable food in New Zealand's bush especially if you do not know what you are looking for. Many native plants have little nutrition and can be toxic. It is wise to carry sufficient additional food in the event something goes wrong.

#### PREPARING FOR WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

**We should never assume that 'it will never happen to me'.** Regardless of whether you are embarking on a day hunt or a more extensive multi-day trip, preparing well is essential for survival.

Before setting off on his hunt, Andreas packed a muesli bar and spare clothing. He took his GPS and compass, fire

lighter and compass. His food, spare clothing, lighter and water bottle proved invaluable, but some essential items were missing. Spare batteries for the GPS would have enabled Andreas to continue to navigate and once becoming confused about his location, would have aided his safe return back to camp. The GPS he carried did not have mapping software, so it would have been important to have saved his camp as a waypoint before departing. Andreas did not carry a map and as already mentioned, if an electronic navigation device fails then a map and compass is a reliable backup. Coordinates from your GPS can also be transferred to your map as a grid reference which will pinpoint your location on the map. Carrying navigation equipment and backups is essential and should never be overlooked. A personal first aid kit is also essential and should include personal medications such as EpiPen for allergic reactions or an inhaler for an asthmatic. Regardless of the extent of your trip, you should always leave your written

A photograph of a black, handheld vacuum packer device. The device has a long, narrow body with a handle and a vacuum nozzle at the end. It is shown next to a piece of meat that is partially wrapped in a clear plastic bag. The device is branded with 'TUSOCK OUTDOORS' and 'BATTERY-POWERED VACUUM PACKER'.

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Technology like the Garmin InReach didn't exist in Andreas day, but they aren't foolproof, they can run out of battery



intentions with a responsible family member or friend. The information should contain:

1. the names and contact details of your hunting party
2. the emergency contact details including any medical conditions
3. vehicle registration number and details of where you are parked
4. dates of the trip, including entry and exit points
5. intended daily movements and location of camps
6. emergency equipment you will carry
7. possible alternative routes.

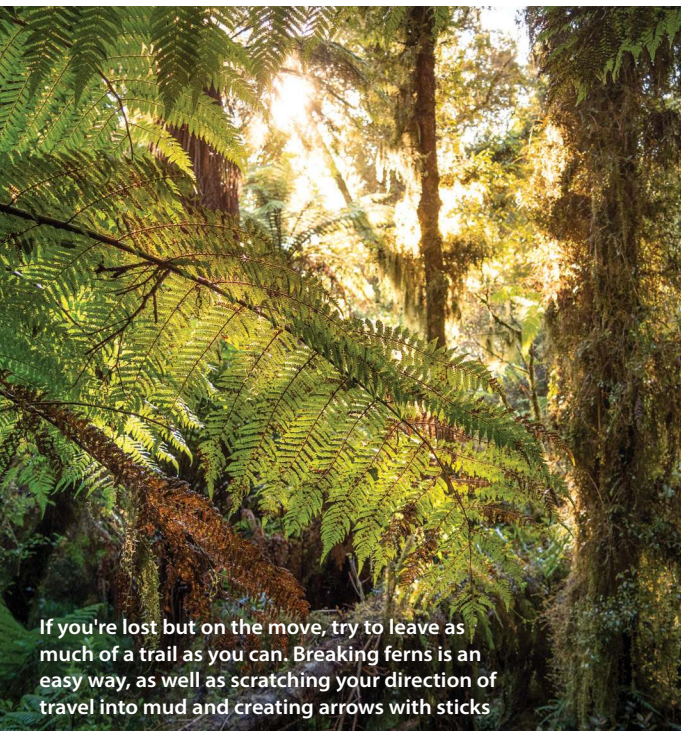
If you leave camp for a day hunt, let your hunting mates know your intentions before you leave. If you do not return as intended, they will be able to direct searchers to the right area.

## COMMUNICATION EQUIPMENT

**Back in 2006, when Andreas went through his ordeal, there was not much available in the way of communication devices.**

There was the SSB mountain radio, but this was not commonly carried by a day hunter. Nowadays, cell phones are more commonly used for communications as the cell coverage has spread and improved in the back country, however coverage should never be taken for granted. Some GPS devices have a two-way radio function that lets you stay in touch with fellow hunters. The InReach device which allows you to send and receive text messages via satellites. InReach will also send an emergency SOS message as well as allowing those at home to track your location. There was no such thing in Andreas's day. The Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) is a device that once activated will alert emergency services and provide them with your exact location for deployment of rescuers. The PLB is registered to you so once activated emergency services will have the name of the registered owner and other relevant information.

Like the GPS, all electronic equipment needs batteries for power. It is important to ensure the batteries are healthy and to carry spare batteries for those devices that provide for replacements. There are also now options to repower devices such as battery banks and small portable solar panels.



If you're lost but on the move, try to leave as much of a trail as you can. Breaking ferns is an easy way, as well as scratching your direction of travel into mud and creating arrows with sticks

## HELPING SEARCHERS FIND YOU

**Andreas carried a rifle and five rounds of ammunition.** Firing a rifle can be an effective means of helping searchers find you as the sound

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Andreas with his survival stick

**Andreas's fire, built to keep him warm at night, also doubled as a signal fire.** He left a stash of green fern fronds close by should a helicopter fly over in the late evening or early morning so that he could produce a lot of smoke that would be visible from the air. Smoke differs in colour from mist or cloud. Smoke's bluish colour is easily recognisable as it rises through canopy. Smoke can also be smelt from inside low flying aircraft and from some distance away if the wind is favourable.

**Wearing a hi-vis garment and leaving markers will help you be seen from the air.** Use your survival blanket or wave your orange vest tied to a stick. If you move leave a trail of deliberate sign behind you. Break fronds at regular intervals and leave direction of travel arrows made of sticks or scraped into mud patches in places that are easily noticed.

Remember if you do not walk out of the search area and remain in the vicinity you became lost in, you are more likely be found by searchers from both the air and ground. Do everything you can to help searchers find you.

of a rifle shot can be heard from some distance away. Andreas fired three shots in quick succession 26 hours after he became lost, and one shot the following day. Unfortunately, searchers who had been deployed did not hear any shots.

**The standard for emergencies is three shots one minute apart to allow searchers to ascertain the direction the shots came from.** Not all search parties carry firearms but those that do can answer the lost party with a one shot reply. This will let the lost party know their shots have been heard and will greatly hearten them. Searchers will hope the lost person stays put until they are reached. If you are a lost person and searchers indicate that they have heard your shots or calls, then do not move toward them but remain where you are. Carry extra ammunition for emergencies and do not fire your emergency shots until you know searchers are in the vicinity. A helicopter flying in your area may be a good indication that searchers have been deployed.

Include a whistle in your survival kit. Using a whistle to help searches locate you is far more effective than shouting. Shouting exerts a lot more energy than blowing a whistle and your voice will only last so long when shouting. Again, if your whistles are answered by a search party, stay put.

**Worth mentioning is that Andreas cut himself a walking stick.** This became his essential tool. He used it to lean on for short rest stops, to aid walking when he was drained of all energy, to move bush lawyer away from his path, to poke his fire back into life and to stop him from falling after tripping. Despite the stick, Andreas fell many times but always went down relaxed to minimise hurting himself and doing serious damage.

Learning and practicing survival techniques will increase your chances of survival. Have a go at lighting a fire in bad weather and practice building an emergency shelter. Think about your emergency plan including what you should carry in your day pack should something go wrong. You may never get to use your survival kit, but it's there to give you the best chance of survival should you need it.

On walking out to the Desert Road on day five, Andreas was picked up by a truck driver 15 kilometres north of Turangi. He was driven to the Turangi Police Station suffering from severe exhaustion and hypothermia. **Andreas lost ten kilograms over his five-day ordeal, and it took special medical care and some time to fully recover. His story of survival is a cautionary tale where we can all benefit from the lessons learnt.**



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<b>Detection Range</b>	1816m
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<b>Objective Lens</b>	35mm
<b>Pixel Pitch</b>	12µm
<b>Eye Relief</b>	70mm
<b>Frame Rate</b>	50Hz
<b>Field of View</b>	7.5°x5.6°
<b>NETD</b>	≤40mk
<b>Weight</b>	<950g
<b>Dimensions</b>	385 x 85 x 75mm
<b>Max Battery life</b>	15 hours
<b>Built-in memory</b>	32GB

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<b>Detection Range</b>	1818m	<b>NETD</b>	≤35mK
<b>Laser Rangefinder</b>	800m	<b>Weight</b>	400g
<b>Objective Lens</b>	35mm	<b>Dimensions</b>	160 x 90 x 50mm
<b>Pixel Pitch</b>	12µm	<b>Max Battery life</b>	6 hours
<b>Optical Magnification</b>	2x ~ 8x	<b>Built-in memory</b>	32GB



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# UNFORGETTABLE

## FIRST CHAMOIS

WRITTEN BY  
STEPH PENNYCOOK

**Hunting and the outdoors have always been a passion of mine, stemming back to my childhood growing up in England and being able to hunt small game animals with my brother and Dad**

**I've now lived in New Zealand for ten years and relish the opportunity to hunt the magnificent large game animals this country has to offer, thriving on the chance to explore new territory but also the privilege of being able to harvest fresh free-range meat to feed the family. Crossing paths with a mature trophy animal along the way is always an added bonus.**

In the last weekend of May, Braydon and I decided to hit the mountains in search of my very first chamois. Family and life commitments meant we only had a two-day window for this hunt.

**We set off first thing Friday morning and headed for Makarora, where we decided to try our luck in new public land and were flown into the valley at first light.** With a fine weather window, we were dropped into the heart of prime chamois country and chose

to camp above the bushline. Finding a suitable piece of flat ground to pitch the tent was proving difficult, resulting in us both sliding to the bottom of our tent numerous times in the night.

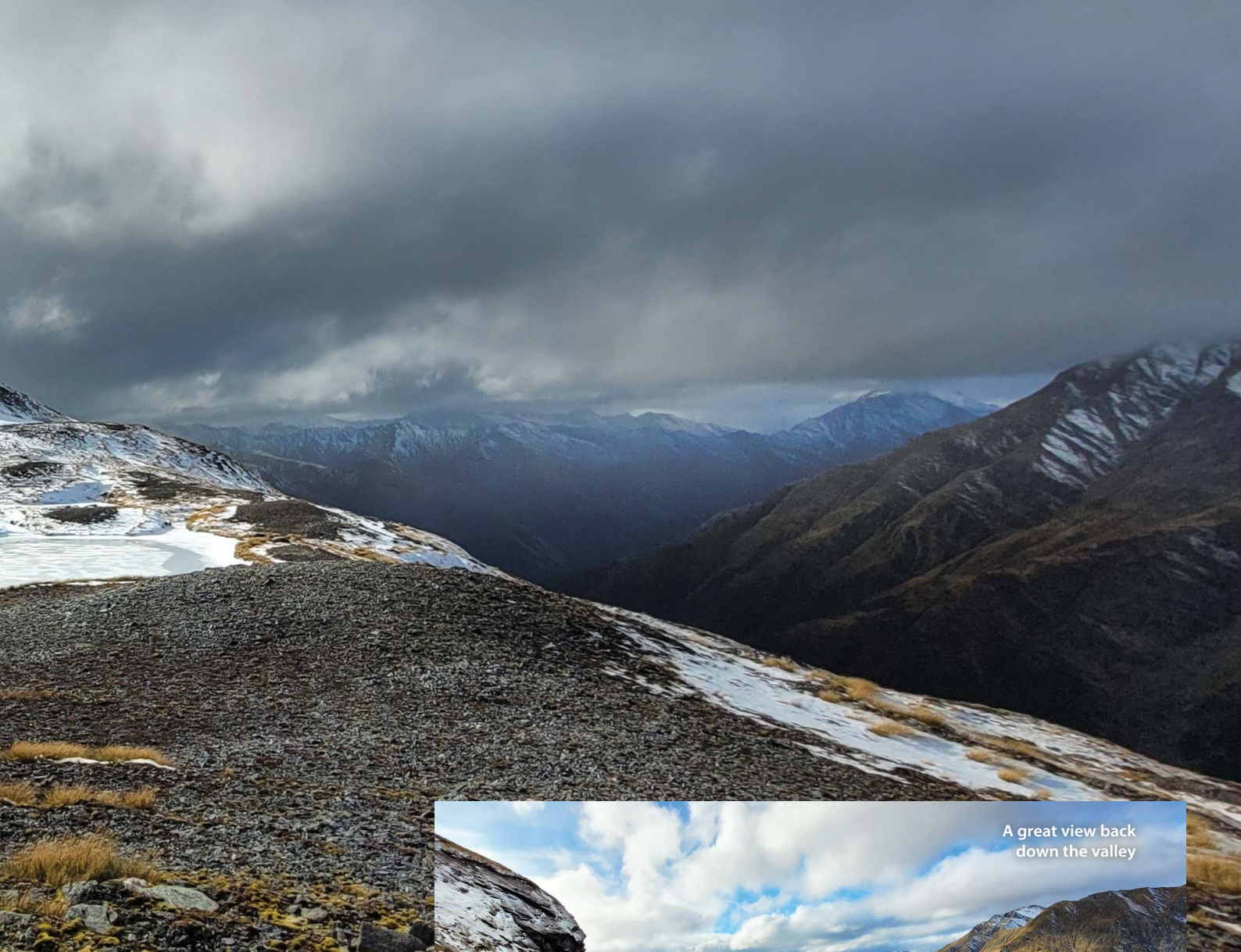
A quick glass of the country in front of us revealed no animals, so we shouldered our packs and headed towards the tops. As we gained elevation the snow underfoot made for an exhausting climb. With promising country ahead of us we powered on, stopping every now and

then to glass new country as it came into view. Upon reaching our destination we were greeted with spectacular views and an array of country to cast our eyes over. After a couple of hours behind the binos, five chamois were spotted high in a far snow-covered basin. With the day drawing on and a potentially difficult decent to camp these animals were safe from us that day.

**It was just our luck when, on our descent back to camp, we spied a chamois feeding a mere 100 metres from our camp.** With fading light and him feeding away from us there wasn't time to find a shootable position.

As the sun rose over the mountain tops, we had breakfast whilst glassing the country across the valley from us. We spotted several chamois displaying what looked like typical rutting behavior. Although a couple of these animals appeared to show some potential, they too were not accessible from our location. So, with a full day ahead of us, we set off from camp to open up new country in the opposite direction to which we had travelled the previous day. Another



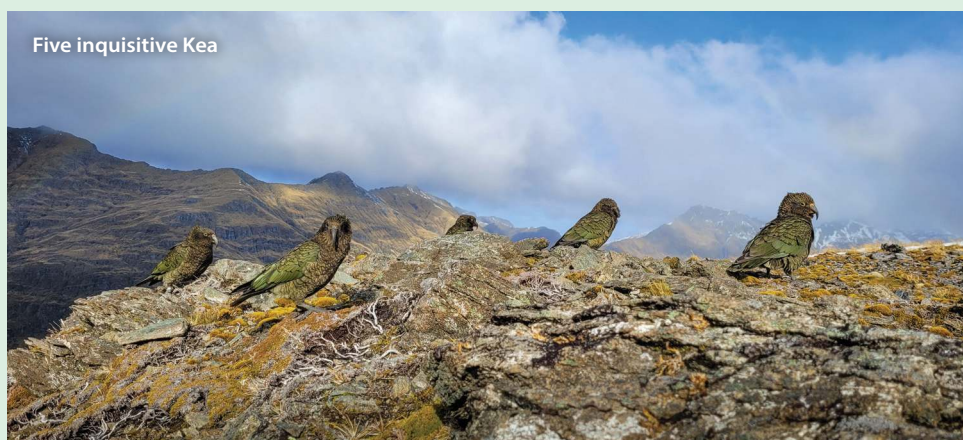


challenging climb ensued, this time navigating icy scree slopes, really testing me both mentally and physically, as I had never hunted this kind of terrain in winter conditions. Determination to get my first chamois overran my fear of the demanding climb, and we pushed on to the tops. Once there we were greeted with a howling wind and five very inquisitive kea. Donning gloves and extra layers and tucked up over the edge in a sheltered spot we glassed the new valley in front of us. Not long after we spotted what appeared to be a lone chamois buck camped up on the coldest and roughest side of the valley. **As Braydon was more experienced, it was decided he would attempt the stalk to get a closer look, while I stayed back in the company of the kea.**

It was starting to look like luck was not on our side on this trip. On his way down to the buck he noticed a nanny and her young one between them. With bluffs cutting off any other routes they stood directly in his path, preventing him from being able to move into a desirable shooting position. At this point he was still 350 yards from the buck, with less-



A great view back down the valley



Five inquisitive Kea

than-ideal weather conditions and only the buck's head and neck visible. Having no other viable options Braydon decided to take the shot, unfortunately it was a clean miss. After he returned empty handed, we sat down for a late lunch.

Once again, we were joined by the kea, this time one trying to help himself to one of our Back Country meals. Feeling a little deflated and as if we had wasted a fair bit of time on this stalk having glassed all surrounding country to come



10 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> on his best side and  
10 <sup>4</sup>/<sub>8</sub> on the other



All caped out



“there’s a chamois right there!!” With that he grabbed the range finder, and at only 230 yards away it was instantly obvious this buck sported impressive horns. This time it was my turn behind the rifle and with a good rest on a rock just five metres from the tent I lined up and took the shot. The 140gn 7mm-08 made solid contact dropping him where he stood. **Feeling absolutely stoked and somewhat relieved, I had just shot my first chamois, in a turn of events that I still can’t quite believe.** Boots had to be re-laced for the short climb to retrieve my buck as we had slipped into the comfort of our Crocs for the evening glassing session. Beaming with excitement we charged up the hill and upon arrival it became apparent this buck was

up empty handed, we decided to head back to camp in the hope of a chamois eventuating in the bluffs above camp. Once back at the tent we sat down for some well-earned cheese, salami and crackers while spending the final daylight hours relentlessly scanning the bluffs directly above camp in the hopes an animal would appear. **The kids had requested a flat skin rug for their rooms so any animal was going to suffice. The light was now quickly fading, and we were feeling like time was running out as our chopper was due to return in the morning to pick us up.** No sooner had Braydon said, “Well I guess that’s it then, no success this trip”, I caught some movement out the corner of my eye. Glancing up there stood a chamois feeding across the hill, not in the slightest bit phased by us down at camp. I turned to Braydon in disbelief and said,

even bigger than we initially thought. Measuring 10 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> on his best side and 10 <sup>4</sup>/<sub>8</sub> on the other, both with 3 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inch bases, it was an absolute ripper of a first chamois with a 28 DS. After a few quick photos we set about caping him out before making the short journey back downhill. That evening we celebrated with a couple of cold beverages.

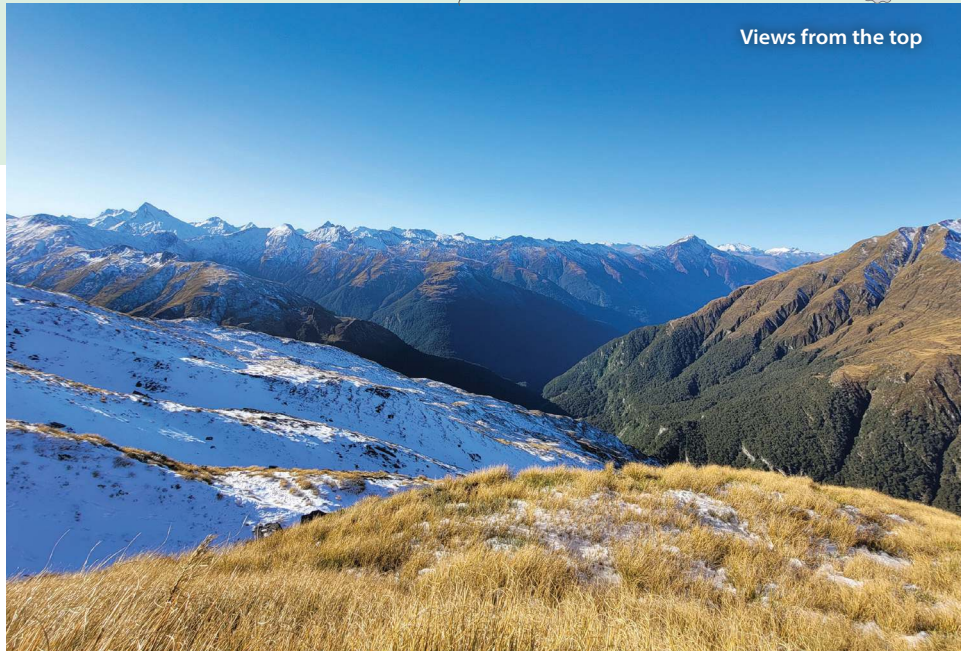
The final morning dawned as another cracker day and once camp was packed up, we spent our final couple of hours soaking up this majestic country and watching distant chamois move about the rugged terrain. The distant thud of helicopter rotors echoed through the valley signaling the end of our successful chamois rut mission. **The kids may have missed out on their rug, but I will be forever graced with not only my first chamois, but an epic trophy on the wall.**



Even kea rate the Back  
Country Cuisine



Views from the top







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# Chasing Weather & Chasing Game

WRITTEN BY  
MITCH THORN | @SOUTHISLANDRIFLEWALKERS

**The West Coast. Famed for its incredible landscapes and spectacular views, unforgiving weather and harsh environment, big animals and even bigger country**

A thick band of monkey scrub separates the steep bush-covered valleys from the rugged mountain tops above. Rough battered tracks weave their way up the gorge riddled rivers - it has a certain allure to it. You know it always has the potential to offer up that trip of a lifetime. That's exactly what Chris, Raddy, and I were searching for when planning a week of hunting into one of our bucket list spots. We'd spent hours poring over maps, analysing route guides and reading stories of other adventurers' trials and tribulations experienced in the remote headwaters of the area. All we needed now was a bit of luck with the weather forecast and we were off.

Rain. Bucketloads of it. Our second Westland trip was cancelled for the year.

We wanted to just suck it up and go anyway, but with around 100 mm of rain forecast for most days of the trip the chances of us reaching our destination would be slim to none. We scrambled together a Plan B for the week by finding the only place in the South Island with a half decent forecast. Instead of our epic West Coast adventure we strung together a tops trip into an area none of us were familiar with. With no idea on animal numbers, or if our intended tops route was even possible, we set off into the unknown, hoping for a trip half as good as our original plan. Our route was a big loop trip across the tops which involved a 15 kilometre

road walk to round out the week. To get around this we each brought a pair of running shoes and dumped them at the trailhead up the road – a punishment for someone if they missed a shot!

Dooshka! Twenty minutes into the walk Chris dropped a pig on the riverbed. We could hardly believe our eyes as the two pigs spooked out in front of us from about 20 metres. If we wanted a sign our Plan B wasn't such a bad alternative, a pig on a platter was enough to change our expectations for the week. We whipped off the back steaks and started our hike to the hut. The 'little walk' to the hut ended up being a bit of a gut buster; five hours of battling found us reaching the hut right on dark.

Waking to clag is never a nice feeling on a hunt, especially when the forecast is only meant to get worse. In hindsight, lucky is the term I'd use to describe the actuality of the trip. We wanted to



hunt the head of the valley where the hut was situated; our underlying aim was to bag a nice chamois buck for the wall.

Relying on a fairly positive forecast we set off up valley with full packs to camp at a nearby tarn. The climb was tough - a steep scramble up a scree slope with sideways rain pelting us on our way. It was a different story over the ridge. Sheltered from the wind we timed it to perfection as rain and clag cleared to reveal the incredible country we were surrounded by. The small unassuming ridgelines on the topo map came to life in front of us. Large crumpling peaks jutted out above tussock filled basins that were hanging above the steeply walled native forested valleys. Open grassy flats were scattered along the valley floor into the distance. It may not have been the mighty West Coast but it wasn't far off! The peaks poked up above 2000 metres, and the only thing missing was the Main Divide towering over us.

The hut book was filled with uninspiring notes about the animal numbers in the area but looking around, the country looked about as good as any we've seen; enough tucker and plenty of cover around so there had to be pockets of animals. Raddy proved our suspicions right by spotting a couple of deer bedded up high in the tussocks. They were a long way away and in the wrong direction

from our intended route. We let them be and carried on. Raddy again spotted a mob of four deer feeding in the tussocks below and I picked up a pair of chamois chasing each other around in the steep stuff. Too far off to get a proper assessment but definitely worth a closer look.

We decided we'd save the chamois for the morning and focus on getting camp set up and try to close the gap on a deer in the evening. The topo map directed us to a picturesque tarn nestled under the main ridgeline near the head of the valley. There was plenty of flat ground for a couple of tents and some boulders nearby made a great windbreak to set up the cookers for some overdue lunch. The plan was simple; take our time dropping down the face below camp using the terraced hillside to keep out of sight of the deer. They were feeding just above the bushline at the head of the valley, directly downhill and across the creek from us. After about 20 minutes of bum shuffling through the tussocks we ran out of cover. The rangefinder had them at 380 yards, a manageable distance with Chris's 300 win mag. It was Raddy's turn on the trigger - he got himself comfortable whilst I setup the tripod and got the camera rolling. You never hope your mate's going to miss but with a 15 kilometres road run on the line... if there's ever a time to do it...

He slotted it just behind the shoulder, slightly further back than he'd hoped but it got the job done... the bastard.

With the pressure now off for securing some meat, we could turn our attention to a trophy. The boys set off down the hill to butcher the deer whilst I popped back to camp to play around with the drone and get started on dinner - not a bad deal if you ask me.

Pork risotto was on the menu that night - bloody beautiful. We had carried in some sausages for the first night which meant the meat had a chance to rest since being shot the day prior. That spilled over to the venison as well, so no chewy steaks on this one.

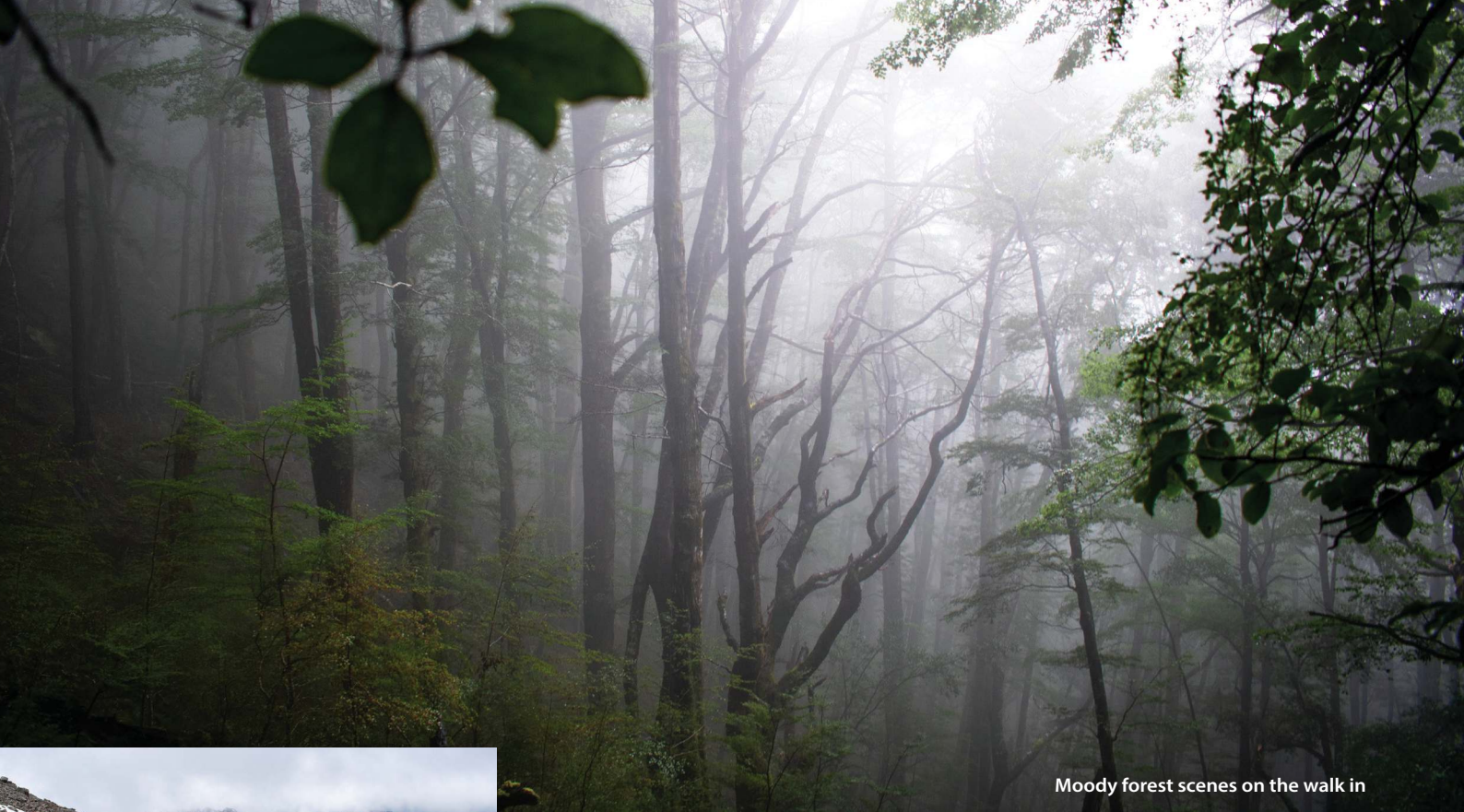
I was up early the next morning buzzing with the excitement of laying eyes on those chamois. We glassed for about half an hour before I picked up a pair in the distance. Luckily for them they were a long way away from where we needed to go. We were staring down the barrel of a massive day, with no time for a detour with a weather bomb set to hit that night.

Breaking camp we set off along the leading ridgeline. There were about six kilometers of tops to traverse to reach a hut a few catchments away. We knew the day was going to be the first big question mark around the plausibility of our route. As per usual we talked ourselves into leaving the ice gear in the truck after looking at the front country, these hills were a bit bigger... a lesson we never seem to learn.

Thankfully there wasn't too much snow about and only the south facing peaks were holding enough to cause any trouble. We made our way up and onto the main ridgeline. There are not many better feelings than walking along the top of a range soaking in the incredible country that surrounds you. Knowing







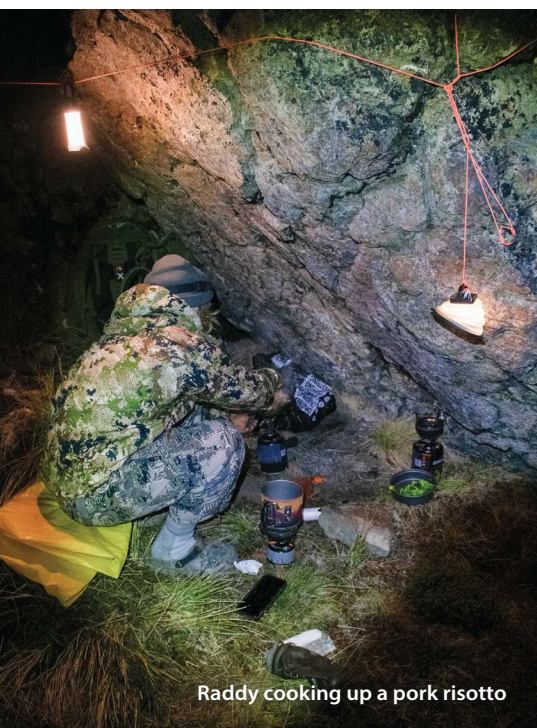
Moody forest scenes on the walk in



You can't beat camping by a tarn!



Raddy with the first deer of the trip



Raddy cooking up a pork risotto

you've worked your ass off to get there makes it that much sweeter.

We had been following the ridgeline up towards a peak; the hut was in the valley on the other side of it. **The country was getting steeper and up in front of us was an exposed rock wall; about 20 metres near vertical before it leveled back off to a steep rocky ridge.** We

had two options: climb the face to stay on the ridge or drop down a debris chute and sidle out onto the tussock face below. The climb was definitely doable, but we had no idea if the ridgeline was negotiable past there. The chute looked steep and the sidle out to the tussock looked bony and pretty gnarly. Both routes had their dicey sections. We decided to trust our gear, our ability and our judgment to climb the face. If the ridgeline turned to custard up top, we would lower the packs back down using the rope in our packs and downclimb without 30 kilograms of gear causing any trouble. The razorback ridge was bloody exposed, near enough to 2000 metres elevation with a bone breaking fall either side at best.

**We were stopped by a head-high lip. Chris went on ahead without his pack to assess the route.** Whilst he shot off ahead having the time of his life Raddy and I sat back silently puckered. We were both battling our nerves to bail out. As we started discussing a bailout plan Raddy spotted Chris frolicking along the ridgeline about 100 metres ahead of us. "Once we get over this lip it's pretty easy for the rest of it" he assured us, and to his credit he was right. He only

muttered "this was a lot easier without a pack" once. The route itself wasn't all that technical, we've definitely been in scarier spots while hunting tahr. I think what threw me off was how exposed it was, any slip ups and we'd be in serious trouble... I definitely reaffirmed my risk tolerance. That 200 metre section would've taken us at least an hour to negotiate.

A few hundred metres below the peak another ridgeline met ours. The basin below was full of snow and the ridgeline turned to custard. An ice axe and crampons would've really come in handy... Chris led the way kicking into the snow doing the hard yards. **Our goal was to drop off the other side of the ridge down into the valley.** The topo map looked awfully steep, and it was a south facing slope. I can't say any of us are religious, but we did a wee prayer to Mother Nature in the hopes that there was a way down.

First impressions over the other side were not good but the view was out the gate. A massive tarn opened up below us filled with crystal clear water. The bush somehow seemed to be clinging on to the near vertical valley walls that lanced their way up to the rocky peaks above. The peaks across the valley were a whole new level of scary, and it was a shame our route had us going up and over them as well.

We took a much-needed break to soak in the view, grab a snack and discuss our options. There was a finger of scree cutting its way down the face below us. It weaved between the snowpack and





We had no idea if there would be a way down the other side

rocky outcrops before disappearing into what looked like a bluff system. Luckily there was a way down with only one sketchy section. We didn't need any convincing, we were chilling by the tarn having a very late lunch in no time.

We could finally relax. **All that was left was an hour long walk down the valley floor to the hut.** Thinking I'd get a few drone shots before we headed off, I flew up to the ridge we had just dropped down from and tracked our route down the scree. Before I knew it, I was looking at an upside-down view of the world all the way back up to where we had come from. Absolute idiot. The boys were in hysterics. I packed it in and set off running. You wouldn't believe it, but a small gray box is awfully hard to find on a scree full of grey rocks. This didn't really occur to me until I was halfway up with absolutely no idea where it was. The boys were probably laughing even harder by now watching me lose my mind grid searching the scree slope. Luckily, it turns out the people who designed drones were thinking of muppets like me; I heard a faint beeping echoing up from further down the scree. Phew!

The only chamois we spotted all day was in the scrubby fringes we traveled through at the end of the day. He had enough going on up top to get us excited; just not quite the chamois we were after. We were spent and the hut couldn't come soon enough. We arrived just after dark at an empty hut with a very healthy woodshed. You bloody ripper.

**A hut day followed, rarely sought after but often welcomed (at least on the longer trips).** With two days of rain forecast we made ourselves at home and took the opportunity to rest. The rain was pelting down outside as we shared stories, stoked the fire and played cards.

Chris and I couldn't believe it when Raddy said he'd spotted a chamois from the hut window. Through eight years of backcountry hunting, I had never

looked at a chamois and immediately known it had the length to be a shooter, until I saw this one. It was bucketing down outside but we couldn't let an opportunity like this slip by.

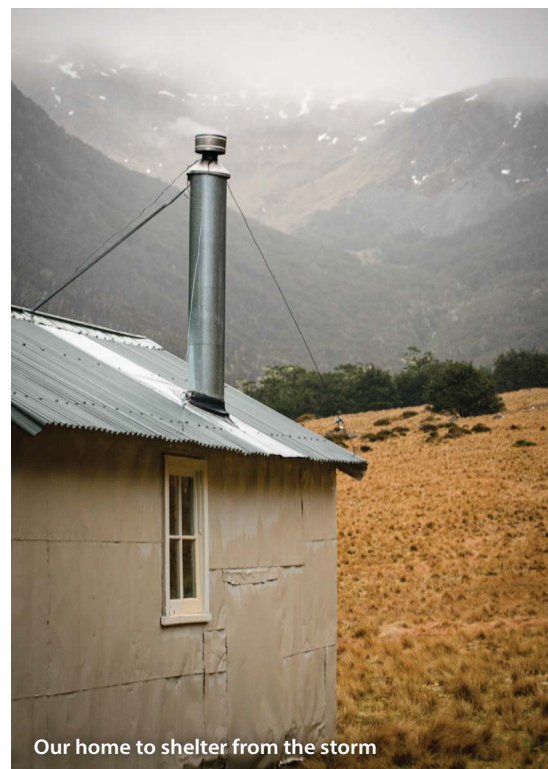
Raddy stayed in the hut filming out of the window whilst I snuck out and lined it up. It was about 100 metres up the face above us and ranged at 200 metres. I was shooting at a pretty horrible angle uphill, but I had a great rest and a steady scope. **My crosshairs were locked on its shoulder, there was no movement as I slowly squeezed off the shot.**

It went about a foot high. The chamois immediately disappeared into the bush, I was stumped. What the hell went so wrong? I couldn't blame the gun as Raddy had just nailed a deer at close to 400 metres with it. Because of the angle I had leant the end of the barrel on a piece of wood to get my rest. Chris had warned against it but I'd disregarded his advice in the heat of the moment. I was worried the chamois would spook at any second, so I didn't want to mess around. The first thing my old man said to me when I was telling him about the miss was "you weren't leaning on the barrel were you?" A lesson he'd drummed into me growing up shooting. Whoops...

The next day was much the same (minus the chamois). To shake our cabin fever we set off on an evening hunt to the flats at the head of the valley. On our way down to the hut a few nights prior we spooked a deer in the dark. The area stunk of deer; we were optimistic there would be a few animals out enjoying the clear weather. It took about 20 minutes of hiding in the bush edge for an animal to feed out. Across the creek, no further than 150 metres away. After my efforts the previous day, I handed shooting rights off to Chris who made sure of the job with a shot through the front shoulder. **It had to be**



The 'wall' we had to climb



Our home to shelter from the storm

**one of the simplest hunts we've been on, and almost felt scripted.**

The 100L Tatonka packs were bulging as we set off from the hut the next morning. We needed to get up and over the range to reach the next river valley that led out to the road. Our hut days had given us plenty of time to find a route on the topo map. About a kilometer downriver of the





A great way to round off a hut day

hut there was a side creek that led up to a saddle. The bottom of the creek started at some large open flats, about 2 kilometres long. **Chris spotted a couple of deer feeding out in the open.** The packs were way too heavy to consider taking another one, especially with the scale of the day ahead of us. Instead, I decided to stalk down with my DSLR camera to try get some photos in close.

I couldn't believe my eyes as a couple

of deer turned into 20! I was hidden just inside the bush edge watching the most deer I've ever seen on one set of flats. It was about 9am and they were feeding right out in the middle of the clearing.

**The lens on my camera isn't good enough to get the shots I wanted and there wasn't any more cover between me and them.** Like a dog chasing a flock of seagulls I sprinted out from the bush edge expecting them to

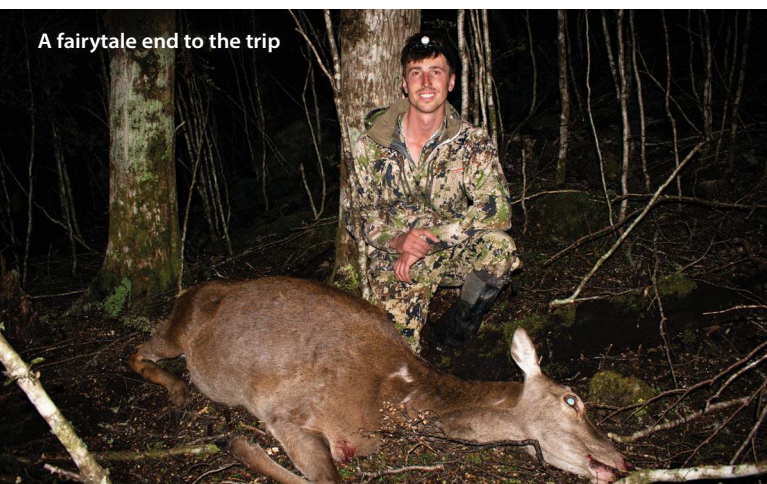
bolt. 200 metres turned into 100 metres and they still hadn't spooked. By this point they were all staring at me, frozen in what I can only imagine was disbelief. I stopped to take a few photos but still wasn't happy so I carried on running. I couldn't help but start laughing as I continued to close the gap. They finally took off but without much direction in their escape. Mum had never prepared them for a sprinting idiot with a camera giggling like a schoolgirl.

They circled back up the valley and started heading

towards the boys. I started yelling out hoping they'd have a camera ready to film the chaos. It turns out they already did - like a scene out of Forest Gump they'd captured the mob spooking, then me sprinting across frame shortly after. The deer were on the other side of the river heading straight up valley towards the boys. When they got in line with them Chris let out a hind call. It stopped half the mob in their tracks, and a handful of the deer turned and started running right to them. They crossed the river and came within ten metres of the boys before realising it wasn't mum. The footage from the whole situation has to be seen to be believed!

**Our first attempt to reach the saddle had us following the creek.** Within ten minutes we met a waterfall crashing down a tight ravine. Our second attempt took us up the side of the creek before we met a band of bluffs. Third time was the charm as we followed the ridgeline from the start of the creek up through the tight bush. Whoever came up with the term bush bashing absolutely nailed it. Bashed and battered we eventually clambered up from the bush edge to the tops out the back. Raddy left us in his dust as my body started to voice a few complaints about the weight of the pack and scale of the hills.

**If the peaks on the other side of the valley behind us were anything to go off, it was going to be a dicey journey.** If we couldn't make it over, we were left with two options: drop back down to the river and hike 30 kilometres out to the road and hopefully hitchhike the remaining 15 kilometres to the truck or, text a local heli pilot off the InReach and get a ride out from the tops. Chris



A fairytale end to the trip



and I had already convinced ourselves of the latter. We did another group hunter's prayer before taking a peek. You bloody ripper! There was a bit of snow hanging around, but it was easily avoided by heading down a scree slope. With the last major hurdle behind us my only worry left was the road run...

**We spotted three chamois on our way down the creek but weren't convinced any of them would crack that ten-inch mark.** Right at golden hour we approached the flats on the riverbed. There were a couple of deer scattered across the far bush edge about 600 metres away. Knowing the hut was only a short way down river we couldn't pass up the opportunity to try and knock another one over.

We snuck into the bush edge on the other side of the river and started stalking down valley. Before we knew it a hind took off from 50 metres ahead of us and bolted across the flats. One of the deer we had our sights set on spooked at the sight of her, and we couldn't see the last one either. **We thought we'd blown our chances and started the final stroll to the hut.** Close to the hut the first deer we'd spotted reappeared across the river. It was only 200 metres away standing broadside, frozen in place watching us. We dropped behind a rock and got set up, and this time I made sure to rest on



the stock of the rifle rather than the barrel. I let off a shot from the trusty .308 hitting a little further forward than I wanted. The deer fell after a short 30 metre sprint to the bush edge. We could hardly believe it! After 11 hours on the feet we got lucky and knocked over a deer five minutes from the hut. We were absolutely knackered so decided to gut and hang the deer for the night, we could butcher it in the morning before walking back out to the vehicle. The icing on the cake later came when a DOC truck was driving down the road on our walk out and gave

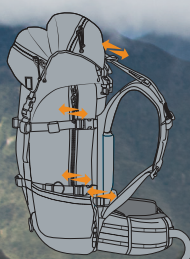
us a ride to the truck.

That rounded off one of the most incredible weeks I've had in the hills. We didn't come home with that trophy buck but there was never a dull moment, even on the two hut days. The route was a much bigger challenge than we had anticipated, both physically and mentally. We shared plenty of laughs and had some unique experiences I'm sure we'll never forget. **For a backup plan the week had offered so much more than any of us had expected.**



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# PART FIVE BUSH PIGLET

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

So, it's been a while....

Firstly we were waiting for components, then we got hit by a biblical flood, and now four months later the story of the Bush Piglet is back! So what have we been up to with the little gun?

For this story I really want to put yourself in my place. Its 6am, you've been driving since 3.30am. With gritty eyes, the usual early morning aches and pains, and a fuel stop pie for breakfast you hardly feel like an athlete. You swing the pack on, rifle in hand and soon arrive at the first and only creek crossing. Confidently you step out for the dry boulder near the middle and as your foot makes contact the toe of your boot slips down while your body

..... pitches forward in the blink of an eye. You smash your knee into the rock with all of your 100kg of body weight plus a pack and go face first in the water. **Desperately trying to bounce out and stay moderately dry you thrust a foot down, fully extend your leg before finding the riverbed and gasp a mouthful of water** – suddenly discovering that you've tipped in to a chest deep hole in the river. Flailing about like a

..... toddler learning to swim (minus the floats) your other knee encounters another rock. **You drag yourself to the bank, both knees pounding, saturated, the camera is drenched and who knows what the contents of the pack are like.** Sitting on the bank you look to the heavens while considering your options as your knee swells and begins to throb. The only appropriate outlet is to laugh at yourself and shake your head, only glad that there was no one there to witness it.

Do you A.) turn around and seek the sanctuary of simply reading about hunting in your nice warm home with its nice comfortable couch?

Or, B.) deal with it and move on.



**Fortunately, after a brief period of soul searching, I went with option B plus voltaren** - in no small part because if I went home I'd still have to sit in my wet clothes for two hours anyway, so I may as well be wet on the hill!

You'll be pleased to hear that it all went uphill from here. Literally and figuratively. On the climb up the scrubby Ahimanawa face, filled with scratchy chest high fern and even scratchier head-high manuka, I realised I had forgotten to fit the magazine release shroud when I swapped the factory Mini Action stock over to the brand new Kroseg Precision carbon stock. Why did I realise this? Because the magazine had released itself somewhere in the last 300 vertical metres!

This is when my fortune turned around, as only fifty metres downhill there lay the offending item gleaming wetly in the early morning gloom. I gladly grabbed it and turned back around, to discover a Sika single-calling in the distance – in the direction I was headed no less!

**Twenty minutes later I was easing in to the first of a string of tiny clearings I had identified on aerial imagery, wet clothes and throbbing knee forgotten.** The openings in the canopy were mostly manuka, but had well grazed grass in the remainder and even a rut pad off to the side. The tightly grown manuka demanded ultimate stealth, so I sat down and made myself stop and listen. With a crisp morning, a favourable breeze and the echo of a Sika roar still floating down the valley all I wanted to do was tear off into the sunrise. However I eased off my pack, marked it on the GPS and moved slowly forward, threading the little Mini Action through the scrub ahead of me.

Slowly, ever so slowly, easing my way through the tight manuka I honed in on where I thought the roar had come from. In such a prime position and with so much sign around I didn't want to roar in case I just brought a satellite stag in first. I wanted to keep my powder dry and save that option for later and not alert the stag that I was in the area. Especially if he was smart and wanted to

circle down-wind.

I needn't have worried, Sika senses far outperformed mine. Looking at a solid wall of manuka I eased to my left, up a small rise under some rewarewa, fortunately quiet because of the recent rain. Or so I thought.

All of a sudden my straining ears made out the rush of hooves and the clacking of antlers on manuka. The master stag had heard me and decided to come see off the intruder. I waited, tense as a bowstring.

The clacking came closer. **First I saw antlers, and then a dark Sika stag pushing through the scrub, antlers laid back to ease his passage.** As his head came over the rise I saw his antlers meet the skull very low down, and then as more revealed itself, an eye rolling forward - all of a sudden he froze, one eye gleaming in shock as it registered my strange and unexpected shape. This was my only chance, the Zeiss came to my eye and I squeezed off the 6.5 Grendel in a challenging head shot situation.

He leapt up – not the reaction you want from a head shot! The first shot blew up quickly in the bone on the front of his face. I quickly followed him in the scope and as he paused near another rewarewa a follow up shot to the neck dropped him where he stood. Now that was worth all of the tribulations! My first 8 pointer! And a nice mature Nippon style stag at that.

**I was using the 95gr V-max loads we had developed last edition, and as it turns out there's still too much velocity at close range in the shortened 6.5 Grendel.** I learnt, very nearly the hard way, that we'd be better sticking to a stouter projectile for bush roar hunting. The shots are often close, and you regularly need to break bone as neck or shoulder shots are common as stags come peering around trees.

The quiet little Grendel hadn't disturbed the area much, so after a very leisurely break-down of the stag I hung the meat in a tree and ditched







Pretty chuffed to finally find an 8 pointer mature enough to pull the trigger on.

Pictured is the Sonic can with only one baffle

most of my gear, planning to camp back here.

The wind now strengthened and swirled cruelly through the steep terrain. I spooked several animals and never got a look at any other stags. **Making camp that night it was back to basics.** 90% of my gear was stuck in my ute at Cody Weller's place in Blenheim, a cancelled ferry meant I'd had to fly home the week before to get a North Island roar. This left me with a fly, a sleeping bag and granddad's billy - all on a bed of fern. Not to mention the homemade focaccia bread from my mother-in-law which was simply divine toasted on a manuka fire! No tent, no jetboil, no mattress - no worries!

Despite the ambience, a fire is a pain for hunting. You have to back off so far from your hunting area and I feel the smoke in your clothes doesn't help your scent control. It was evident that I hadn't backed off far enough when at 6am, while I was making my morning coffee, a stag barked at the smell of smoke as he made his way down to the clearings. Bugger, that was the plan for the morning out the window! **I spent half of the day trying the higher basins but the fickle Sika were pretty quiet on day two,** so reluctantly I returned to camp, crammed a daypack full of meat and antlers, and made my way back to the ute before dark.



All packed up and ready to go home

That was just one of the success stories with the Mini Action. Earlier in the roar we made our annual pilgrimage to the eastern side of Te Urewera and put it through its paces. **Accounting for my brother Jake's Red stag was well and good, but the highlight were the two hinds with the subsonic 140gr Vmax loads.** Greg and I had worked on this load primarily for shooting goats while deerstalking, but they've really proved their worth for sneaky game management as well.

The first was early in the morning as we

stalked in on a stag roaring on the face below us. A yearling hind appeared right in front of us and conscious of cook Chris's request for a hind for some venison (the consequences of failure being a smaller portion...) I put it down with a subsonic round through the front shoulders. It flipped over, dived off the ridgetop and died, moving less than ten yards. Jake and Lucas looked at me funny for risking the chance at a stag 70 yards away for a hind, but said stag soon roared out another challenge, apparently unfazed or even unaware of the suppressed cough from the Mini Action. **It was soon my turn**



give a funny look as Jake clean missed the stag five minutes later ...

The second hind was a mature animal from deep in the forest park. As we worked high up on a face, hoping to angle into a valley sheltered from the cursed gale bending the high altitude beech all around us, I saw a deer raise its head from the crown fern.

**At 60 yards in the open forest I was more conservative and aimed mid-way up the crease, allowing for some drop.** The trajectory from the subs is somewhat rainbow-like, making it a little like shooting a bow. Fortunately this one struck true and the Vmax proved its worth as it opened up and caused significant damage to the heart – not just pencilling through like a monolithic would have. The big girl was dead within 20 yards.

I'd really recommend looking in to subsonics if you're hunting areas with high deer numbers that need the female population reduced a bit. You can shoot a hind and carry on, the deer just around the corner will be completely unawares. **I was sceptical of the killing power with subsonics, but if you're careful with the shot placement (and its low-stakes hunting for hinds, if the shot's iffy just don't pull the trigger!) it's an enormous amount of fun.**

## THE LIGHTENING PROCESS

### SCOPE

**The first steps we made for lightening the rifle in the months since Issue 92 was swapping out the Zeiss V4 3-12x44 for the much smaller V4 1-4x24.** This took us from 638g (22oz) to 470g (16.6oz) – a significant saving on an already light rifle!

The 4x magnification is only just enough, but it is enough - worth it for the weight savings. The old timers will be shaking their heads "we had open sights young fella!" And "A 4 power Pecar was for pansies!". But I like a bit of magnification. When you're trying to pick a small gap in dense scrub using light projectiles I'll take all the assistance I can get thanks Pops.

The Zeiss was crystal clear, as you'd expect, and performed well in low light. On 1 power the suppressor was quite distracting, and I must say an animal would need to be fairly close to warrant 1x zoom and the massive field of view! I thought the small objective lens size

would hinder performance, but the low magnification made it unnoticeable compared to the 3-12x44. It does have a very thick crosshair, no doubt for dangerous game hunting when you can't afford a split second hesitation wondering where the crosshairs are. But given we weren't trying to shoot long range groups it didn't much matter. The lower profile lent a subtle advantage when pushing through tight stuff and the small, recessed objective lens was well protected versus a big exposed 44mm or larger.

### SUPPRESSOR

**The next step was to experiment with less baffles on the suppressor.**

I began the roar with the whole complement of four, which curbed the full-velocity noise well and reduced the subsonics to a whisper. Even after several

months of using them I still delight in that.

During our Te Urewera wanders I removed all of the baffles bar one, reducing the total weight from 315 to 222g. **Obviously this significantly reduced the noise suppression, and was actually more noticeable with the subsonics, but at this point you have to ask what you're really trying to achieve.** I'm trying to take away the big reverberating boom of an unsuppressed shot, make it tolerable over a dogs ears, and protect mine. Using one baffle only with this small little case still provided adequate suppression for me while also shaving an appreciable 60mm off the total length, 193mm to 135mm. What I really wanted to do here was test the relative suppression. Unsuppressed, all baffles, one baffle. But I soon discovered



A classic bush camp made a nice change



Jake with his redemption stag, roared right out on to a clearing

Pictured is the Sonic can with all baffles fitted





Chris's venison order filled using the subsonics

that any form of standard sound meter wouldn't be up to the task. The problems being;

A.) the peak noise limits. Most top out at around 140dB. I'd expect the 6.5 Grendel to be near that without a can, but we'd never know it if it was over.

And B.) the irreconcilable issue. No run-of-the-mill meters can reliably capture the absolute peak of the shot, it happens too quickly for the intervals of recording, or 'response rate', to capture reliably, so it would be completely misleading to even try. Some shots might get it bang on, and others only capture 80% of the peak volume.

**It turns out there are standards for measuring rifle shots, developed by surprise, surprise – the American military**, with "Mil-Std 1447-D" for those of you interested in doing the homework. The sound level meter – and the special pressure microphone used – must be capable of reading up to about 172dB SPL for centrefire firearms. Another one of the crucial requirements for the sound level meter is that it must be able to capture peak sound level impulses with a response time of 20 microseconds or less –  $20\mu s = 20$  millionths of a second!. There's likely only a couple of pieces of equipment capable of meeting these standards in NZ and I couldn't justify the use of one just for this article sorry!

## STOCK

**The next big step was to fit a carbon stock.** We don't need to extoll the virtues of carbon stocks; ultra-lightweight and supremely rigid, they're one of the best upgrades you can do to a rifle.

This issue we used one of the Kroseg Precision stocks, the Howa Mini Hunter, a proudly NZ-made product with a strong heritage. Many of you will remember the

Hi-Tec ads alongside a lot of these articles. Following the untimely death of the founder Ken Henderson, a new company headed by Kaytie Goode and Dan Hardy of Hardy Rifle Engineering bought the business and have taken it to another level.

Each stock is hand laminated with prepreg carbon (for better uniformity and performance) as well as an extra structural layer of unidirectional carbon – running from the front to inside the grip area, adding another stiffening layer to the construction and evident in the final product – very stiff stocks. All are laid inside CNC cut aluminium moulds and cured at high temperatures.

**Two different types of fill are used – a lightweight closed cell in the forend and butt to minimise the infamous echo prevalent in earlier carbon stocks**, and a closed cell structural fill in the action bedding area. The closed cell fill is especially important to stop oils or other moisture getting in.

Each stock comes with a microcell recoil pad as well as your choice of flush cups or sling studs. You can order it in five different paint options, left or right handed, and with a standard, heavy or aftermarket barrel channel.

This Mini-Action stock raises the comb approximately 13mm from the factory plastic stock, has a larger pistol grip and  $\frac{1}{2}$  an inch shorter length of pull. It also has a pleasingly minimalist forend, allowing us to fit it to the 14" barrel 6.5 Grendel with 20mm of clearance for the suppressor,



A big mature hind, a worthy opponent for the subsonic 140gn Amax

and balances the size of the rifle much better aesthetically. The premium touches like the foam-filled stock and great finish and inletting combine to create a really top-shelf upgrade for the Howa Mini Action. It is a smooth finish, with no stippling or grips on the pistol grip or forend. I anticipated that this would become slippery on the hard carbon surface but I really didn't notice it as an issue.

This was a simple upgrade (two bedding screws, and viola!) and shaved an incredible 450g (15.8oz) from the 973g factory stock, which was trimmed a little if you remember from issue 92. At \$1350 it is a pricey upgrade, but you get a lot for your money. There's no other way to cut nearly half a kilo off a Howa Mini Action so easily.

**With the lighter scope, only one baffle and the impressive Kroseg stock we shaved the weight all the way down to an incredible 6lb 2oz (2785g) at this stage of the build.** **With the tiny overall length this gun is a delight to carry in the bush.**





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## WORKING A LINE OF ENQUIRY

# TRUST THE DOG

WRITTEN BY  
DONO GIBBS

Can you finish  
your tea Dad.  
There's deer  
around here

### The squeal came from a thick belt of pepper tree a good 50 metres to our right

Kai, my one-year-old Vizsla/German Shorthaired Pointer cross, winded then looked back at me. This was our fifth day of public land bush hunting since we'd completed the Deer Dog Blueprint. We'd already accounted for a Red spiker on our first visit to the Kaimais, and a respectable Sika stag in an area close to where we had been on a previous trip.

We were about an hour into our early winter morning walk deep in the Kaimanawas, along a rich green moss covered bush trail alongside a steep river gully system. "Trust the dog" was something my hunting friends had drilled into me. With that thought in my mind, I encouraged him with a double peep whistle to move and follow the scent. He acknowledged and worked ahead. **Ducking under some low pepperwood, I noticed fresh tracks in the mud. We were on.**

It was a perfectly still morning, pleasantly cool and overcast. And quiet.

With only micro currents of wind to work with, we'd need to pay attention.

**The only sounds were those of the native birds working above us and the rushing water of the river below us.** Kai worked the ground scent in front and I allowed him room to move. This is something that I'd taken from the writings of Johnny Bissell and resonated with me, and felt that it suited how my dog worked. It provided a real sense of freedom for us both to relax into the rhythm of the stalk. I'd read that German Shorthaired Pointers were originally bred to work well ahead of their owners and will

naturally work in circles to locate game birds. Kai would occasionally work off the ground scent, but circle around and sometimes behind me, to get back on the line of investigation, requiring me to slow down and to stop at times. It let him set the pace.

**There were a couple of things that really reinforced my trust in the pup.** First, he'd shown in the handful of hunts he'd done previously that he could be trusted to work ahead and, most importantly, to not bolt after animals when the Garmin e-collar was put on and it was "business time". Pointing dogs are naturally energetic, with a strong prey drive and Kai is no exception. He also is a bit of a chicken - which I have found is a useful trait when close to animals. Each hunting dog has their own unique personality, strengths, and weaknesses. As I was finding out, it was working with his that really mattered. Second, this collar was paired to a Garmin Alpha 200i clipped to my side, which gave me the peace of mind that neither our family pet, or to be brutally honest the owner, were going to get lost in the bush.



## Working as a Team

**I took care to let him know with my body language that he was in the lead.**

Each time he would turn to check on me, I'd whistle a quiet double peep, walk on calmly, or point for him to continue. While we worked as a team, I wanted him to know that he was in charge of this part of the operation. This continued for the next fifteen minutes until I heard a scuttle in the bush up ahead. We moved down a gut and noticed a skid mark in front of us. The animal was moving, but from the sign, I sensed it was not running so we were still in with a chance. This was getting exciting.

A couple of years earlier, a hunting buddy I'd met in the Kawekas had told me his dog had trailed a hind for a couple of kilometres before locating it bedded down. What an epic experience I'd thought at the time. And here we were, working a similar line of enquiry. Observing Kai work, and the ground in front, I could almost visualise the Sika working through the crown fern at a gentle trot. Fresh sign in the mud revealed steady movement. As I followed, Kai was teaching me to become a better hunter.

## The Tell

**We moved down a steep muddy bank into a creek, following the muddy prints deep in the disturbed, loose soil.** I opted to stop and to rehydrate and, if I'm honest, to get the heartbeat down for a few minutes. We resumed tracking the sign etched up the bank. At the top, nose in the air, Kai "windicated" ahead, balancing up on his two back legs standing to raise his head into the gentle pocket of wind scent. While no rocket scientist, the combination of his body language, and my gut feeling told me that there was a deer just ahead in the ponga belt. Somewhere. We both looked. I got behind his eye line and looked, but nothing, no movement. Then, after what felt like an eternity but



Stopping for a cup of tea

was probably only a couple of minutes, I whispered a double peep for him to move forward, which he did in front and a few steps to the left. Kai can hold the classic point that his bloodlines are famous for, most notably if a fantail dares settle in front. But this was different. He locked up and looked ahead, then back at me, concentrating, then looked ahead, the muscles on his back tensing. This was his tell.

I raised the rifle and looked over his head into the ponga belt about 30 metres in front. Nothing. No movement. But then I looked further, deeper through the front few punga, into the gut in the back. There, a young Sika stood motionless, staring straight back, eyes focused on Kai, who stood tense ten metres in front of me. Softly, I called Kai in, and he turned and moved quietly towards me. Raising the rifle, the cross hairs drifted and settled on the animal's chest. I gently squeezed the trigger. A hit, or so I thought, and the Sika sped off into the bush. Some relief. The shot felt okay, perhaps just to the right of the chest? Or had I pulled the shot? I felt anxiety settle in, after such a long stalk. Kai had taken me for a half hour sojourn, trailing both ground and wind scent, to what possibly was that squealing deer. I desperately wanted to reinforce the young pup's great behaviour with an



animal. But had I put it on the ground? Or had I stuffed up when it really counted?

## Trust The Dog

**We stayed put on the spot for a good ten minutes, hopefully allowing the animal to settle then moved cautiously forward.** At the spot where the deer had stood there





A workable section



The punga belt. The spiker was located deep within

was no indication of a hit, and while I wanted to move to my immediate left where I'd clearly seen it run, the pup wanted to move straight ahead. **It was a bit of a battle in the mind, but I made the decision to "trust the dog".** And so we moved for ten minutes in the "wrong" direction. The further we moved, the more my heart sank. I contemplated pulling the pup back to the spot where we started. Was he trailing the wrong deer? Then, he moved following a ground scent down into another punga belt. We came across blood on the leaves. We continued on following the blood sign.

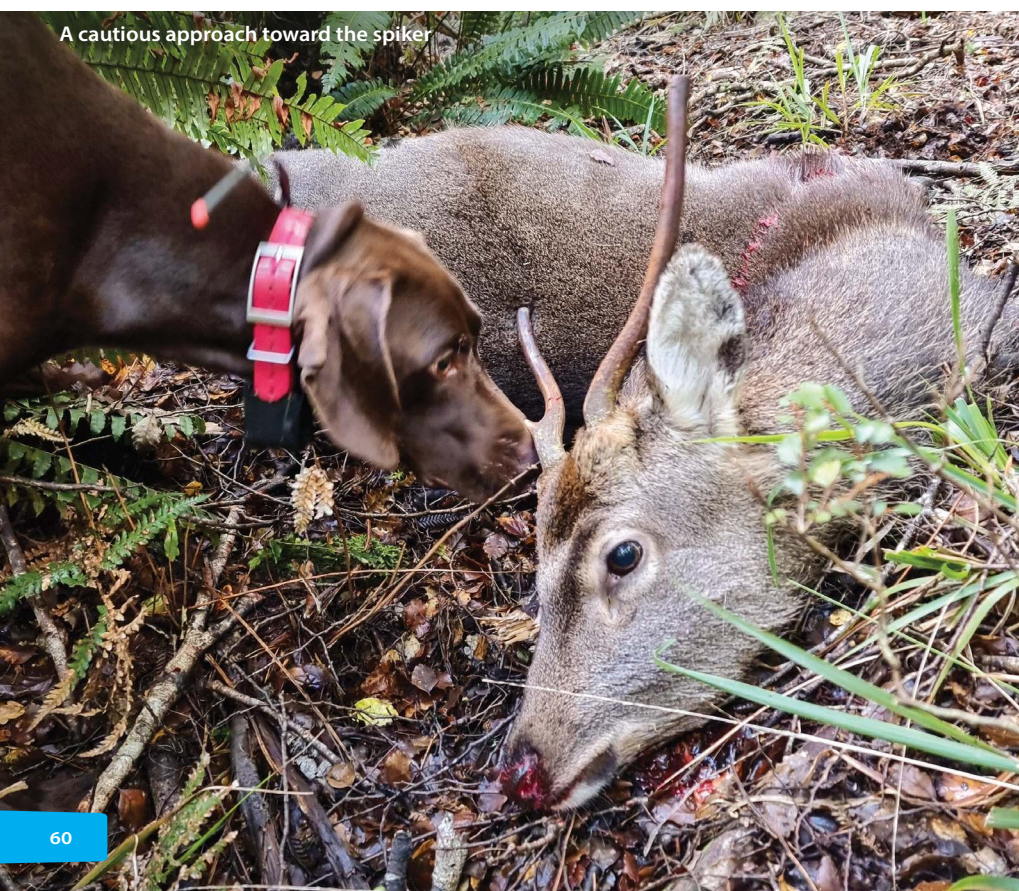
And there lay a young Sika spiker on the ground. I was absolutely rapt. All that training over the last year, all that work, discipline and patience. This was definitely his deer. One I would have never gotten anywhere close to with my novice hunting skill set..

### Enjoying The Moment

**We took the time to respect the animal, letting the boned out meat cool in the winter air, then hung it carefully in a meat bag.** I was honestly floating and so proud of the pup. And what better time to nab an

animal, than when you have one on the deck already? So up the gut we moved to the ridge, and nearly stepped straight into a hot, steaming pile of deer poo amongst the crown fern. Kai indicated ahead. I followed, trying hard to suppress my growing smile. We worked, relaxed, for another ten minutes up a ridge into mature beech, until we came to a ledge that sloped down through thick, dry windfall to a gully 20 metres below. **Kai indicated, moved a step forward, then looked anxiously back at me then down again.** There was no way forward without making noise. I attempted a step, snapping a few dry sticks. A hind immediately stepped up from her bed, proud in her grey winter coat. I raised the rifle and tracked her as she bolted away. What a truly majestic creature.

It had been such a rewarding day. Kai had taught me so many lessons. The first was to relax, and just enjoy the walk in the bush, on that beautifully still, quiet Thursday morning. I also reflected on those moments where I had ignored his gentle nose enquiries into the micro wind currents in the bush, as I was determined in my mind to press on to that mythical "spot X". Perhaps I should have slowed down, trusted the dog, and seen where he wanted to take me? We'd put up more deer over the following months, and both make plenty of mistakes. **But the biggest lesson remained to "trust the dog".**



A cautious approach toward the spiker





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# GUN CLEANING

## WHAT YOU WISH SOMEONE HAD TAUGHT YOU

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY & LUKE CARE

**The roar is over now and if you're at all like me your rifle has taken a battering. Used as a walking stick, tent pole, scrub basher, and if you're lucky - a firearm!**

The process of properly cleaning your rifle, and especially bore, can be a bit overwhelming with often contradictory information thrown about. I asked Greg to run me through a complete demonstration while I took notes – and here's the results.

If you're a bit daunted by the outlay of all of these tools and products, band together between your group of mates and chip in. For the volumes we use as recreational hunters these products will last a long time.

### RIFLE BORE CLEANING TO BEGIN

**There are two compounds present in bore fouling. Carbon and copper.** The first to clean is always the carbon, and on quality barrels that's likely all you'll ever have to worry about.

Use a bore guide – the ones with a solvent application window such as the Pro Shot are the best. Always have a scope cover on to protect your scope lenses, solvents can flick up and land on them when the brush comes out of the muzzle.

Use a carbon fibre or plastic coated steel or stainless steel cleaning rod – the main

thing is to avoid an aluminium rod, they pick up bits of grit and act like a lapping rod. Carbon fibre is nice and stiff and you can't bend it – it's either straight or broken. We prefer a Parker Hale style wrap around jag as opposed to the spear point jag type. With a Parker Hale you get more patch in contact with the bore, and as with all jags, they are calibre specific.

We use a 4x2 patch roll and cut our

own to the specific size required. They usually come on a roll with lines at that dimension but you can cut them to suit. For a 7mm bore we use between 1/3 and 1/2 of a typical 4x2 patch on a wrap around jag.

Wrap the patch diagonally, just be sure not to wrap the tail of it over the shoulder of the jag where it steps up in diameter, or it might jam in the bore.

### STEP ONE - CARBON FOULING

**The first thing to remove is carbon fouling left behind by powder.**

**1. Our first clean is one pass with Bore Tech C4 carbon remover.** You can use any of the specialist carbon removers but we don't recommend an all-in-one cleaner. Dry the rod on a rag after each pass operation.

Use a bore guide with a solvent application window like the one pictured





Note: Try to use tweezers to remove the patch. These solvents are meant to be pretty user friendly but there's no harm in minimizing the contact on your skin.

**2. Now fit the correct-size bronze core brush.** Apply the same Bore Tech C4 then do full forward and back strokes (one forward and back is called a cycle), making sure the brush goes out the end of the barrel before you reverse it, otherwise you'll break the bristles. The general rule of thumb is to do one cycle for each shot you've fired. But generally around 10 or a dozen cycles is a rough guide. After each stroke rotate the brush a little just in case there's a bald patch on the brush. Now we've finished the manual action we let the chemical action do its work for five minutes as it eats and dissolves the carbon buildup.

**3. After the five minutes we use another diagonally wrapped patch to apply a cleaner/degreaser – we use Loctite SF7070.** Any will do but this is one that Greg has found is a bit kinder to humans. Pass through a couple of patches from breech to muzzle, until the patches come out pretty clean. Then use a dry patch, with the aim of removing any remaining residue.

## STEP TWO - COPPER FOULING

We've now removed the carbon fouling from the powder residue and are ready for a copper clean if it needs it. You can use the dual purpose cleaners like Boretech Eliminator, which does a fair job of both so long as you don't have a moderate to bad case of carbon or copper fouling. We prefer to deal with the carbon first as most accuracy issues with quality barrels are from carbon buildup, and the above process will sort it out. But if it doesn't you then know you need to move on to copper cleaning.

Any streaks of copper will cause progressively worse accuracy as copper attracts more copper. A copper build up can cause harmonics issues in the barrel as each bullet gets a slightly different ride down the bore, and in extreme cases it will deform the bullet somewhat. The only copper you can live with is the small amount mixed up in the carbon fouling, which will be removed in the carbon cleaning process. So if you're seeing any copper after that, you need to remove it.

Spin the rifle around and use a bore scope to look from the muzzle backwards for copper residue, as generally the worst copper fouling will be in the last few inches before the bullet exits. On the 28 Nosler (the Tikka from the last rifle series) it was unlikely that there would



Wrap a patch on diagonally, but be sure not to allow it to wrap up over the shoulder of the jag

be much copper for two reasons: One, we used a quality cut-rifled match barrel that is made to extremely consistent dimensions and has been hand-lapped to provide a smooth finish, and two, it has already been broken in and any minor imperfections left from the chamber reaming should have been polished away. If you don't have access to a bore-scope then you'll need to use a solvent that shows colour when reacting with copper (usually blue, but there is one that shows green) – Shooters Choice, Sweets or any of the ammonia based solvents are the sort of thing. Obviously you can't use any brass or copper components in your cleaning system or it will indicate copper when there may be none in the bore at all, so no brass jag or even the little brass ferrule and thread at the end of your carbon fibre or coated rod. Ideally you will use a stainless rod or you risk getting a false "blue" reading. You apply the solvent by pushing a loose fitting patch on a plastic jag through the bore that leaves a lot of solvent on the bore surface, then five minutes later push a clean patch through and if it's blue you know you have an issue.

The first shot down a cleaned barrel is the one most likely to deposit copper on the bore. From then on each bullet has a thin layer of carbon between it and the barrel steel which acts as a buffer between them and largely stops copper fouling.

If this first shot does leave a strip of copper down the bore, as we said it will attract more copper every time a bullet passes. The impact from the first shot from a clean bore is the crucial one in most hunting situations, but a lot of barrels will put the first shot from a clean bore somewhere different to the following shots, as that bullet gets a

different ride down the barrel. One easy way to get around it is to fire a 'fouling' shot after you've cleaned it before you go hunting. We use a case loaded with some fast-burning shotgun powder that has a cleaning patch in place of the bullet. This is the ideal as there's a layer of powder/carbon fouling on the clean steel of the bore without any risk of copper and the now dirty bore should shoot the same for following shots.

There's two ways to remove copper, manually or chemically. Chemical solvents used to all be ammonia based but we've gone away from those and moved to KG12 which is a fast-acting copper remover and is water based. You still can't use any brass fittings or brass cored brushes or the KG12 will eat them up. Normally you go for brass as the aluminium core brushes can pick up grit but when using KG12 we go for an aluminium core brush with nylon brushes.

## CHEMICAL CLEAN

If you're doing any solvent cleaning you have to be sure you have removed any earlier chemicals as you don't want to be mixing chemicals in your bore with unknown consequences, which is why we finished with the degreaser in stage one.

### 1. Fit the nylon and aluminium brush to a stainless rod, coat the brush with KG12 at the breech end.

Quietly push it back and forth the length of the barrel for four or five cycles, then poke the brush out the muzzle end and reapply, and do another two or three cycles. Then leave it for five minutes. Once the time is up rotate the gun 180 degrees so that it is lying stock uppermost and do the same again, and leave it for another





For abrasive polishing use an undersize bore brush, about a 243 for a 7mm bore, then cut a diagonal patch and wrap it around the brush all the way to the end. This means the bronze brush underneath pushes the patch out in to all of the corners and tries to get the nooks and crannies of the grooves, not just polishing the tops of the lands.

5 minutes so gravity means the solvent is sitting in the other side of the bore. Then clean it out using the degreaser and patch procedure.

**2. Next you check with a bore scope, or go back to the ammonia solvent procedure and check all over again.** If there's still any copper visible or (blue if checking with ammonia) then you need to do the KG12 sequence again. But be sure to use the degreaser procedure again first between the indicator solvent and the KG12! It's very tedious, and I'm sure you'll be investing in a bore scope fairly quickly!

## ABRASIVE CLEAN

Abrasive cleaning of the throat to minimise or prevent copper fouling is the best solution if you only have a light copper issue. If there are large chunks you will polish the barrel around the copper, but not underneath it, as you do the hard work of trying to abrade the copper deposit away. So for heavy copper deposits you need to do the chemical

clean first and then finish with an abrasive clean.

Any dodgy barrels Greg always finishes off with an abrasive polish regardless, and on brand new barrels we polish the throat to remove any tiny burrs left from cutting the chamber anyway.

Abrasives are just that, like a grinding paste but very, very, very fine. We use KG2 bore polish and apply it to a clean barrel – carbon cleaned and degreased.

**1. You use an undersize bore brush, about a 243 for a 7mm bore, then cut a diagonal patch and wrap it around the brush all the way to the end.** This means the bronze brush underneath pushes the patch out in to all of the corners and tries to get the nooks and crannies of the grooves, not just polishing the tops of the lands.

Sometimes there is hardened carbon left behind after the usual carbon clean, often in a 'carbon ring' in the throat. You can't clean that out with solvent, you have to use an abrasive, by using the same method as for copper so this is a two-in-

one procedure.

The most important area to clean is the throat and the four or five inches ahead of it, that's where the hard carbon will be building up, and where the copper often gets stripped off the bullet by a rough throat or bore surface. This is especially important for high capacity cases like the 28 Nosler as this is where firecracking will progressively roughen the surface. The polished surface metal is blasted by heat and pressure and becomes rough, almost like alligator skin. This polish will get rid of any hard carbon residue as well as smoothing out the rough firecracking to some extent, causing less damage to projectiles and prolonging accuracy with magnum chamberings.

**2. Short stroke that area, quite fast and firmly as though you were sanding it, and rotating the brush after every few strokes.** Then finish by going all the way out of the muzzle. Never try and pull this back in to the muzzle. The abrasive will slowly bell-mouth the crown, causing fatal accuracy issues – the barrel will need re-crowning. If you're doing full-length strokes to remove copper on the length of the bore then just push the brush until you can feel about a quarter of an inch coming out, then reverse direction. If you have to polish the very end then you're best to push it through, remove the patch, reapply it and push through again. Tedious, but it's the safest method to protect the crown.

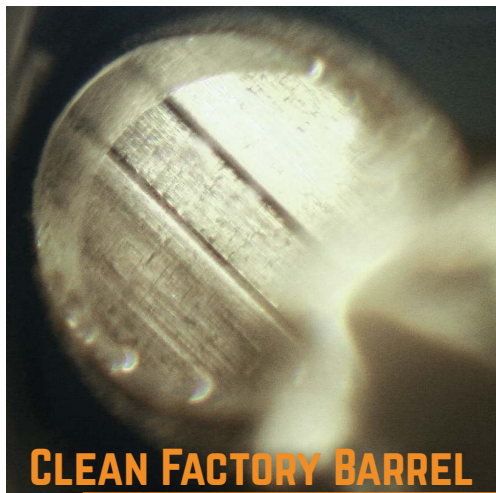
The 28 Nosler build had developed some cracking that could be felt in the cleaning process. The first push with the jag was difficult to reverse against the rough "alligator skin". To picture it in an exaggerated way imagine that it forms the jagged edges almost like barbs on a hook, which catch when you try and reverse the stroke direction. It will take a bit of polishing before it's as easy to pull as it is to push the patch through that area. This polishing of the throat can improve accuracy, especially on bigger capacity, high intensity cartridges with large volumes of slow burning powder.

This abrasive process will likely leave a bit of a ring of residue in the chamber. We use a big nylon bore brush, in this case about a 375, with a bit of tissue paper wrapped around it to wipe out the chamber after any cleaning operation. Otherwise we're just picking up more abrasive compound or whatever as we try to clean it out. The same goes for the muzzle, give that a wipe with tissue paper or your patches will keep coming out with dirty streaks even though the bore may be clean.

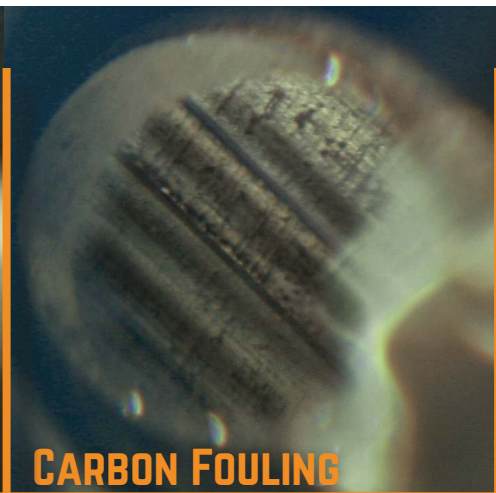


Left to right - bolt grease, carbon remover, bore polish, degreaser and oil

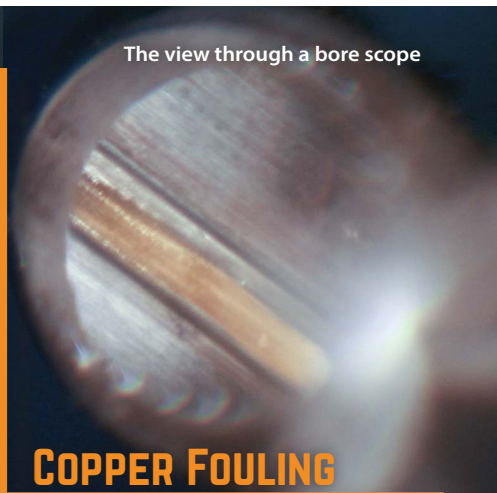




**CLEAN FACTORY BARREL**



**CARBON FOULING**



The view through a bore scope

**COPPER FOULING**



**LAPPED MATCH BARREL**



**PITTING**



**TOOL MARKS**

**3. Finish with the standard degreaser cleaning process;** two or three wet patches (until they come out clean) and then some dry patches.

**4. Finally we oil the bore, a little KG4** (an oil preservative, but also the best we've found at allowing the first shot to go in the group) dropped in a ring around the patch, don't smother it in it. Scrub that up and down until you feel it's coated the barrel thoroughly. Then finish on a dry patch to scrub excess oil out, you don't need much in there. Theoretically if you loaded the bore up with too much oil you could actually bulge the barrel, but that's a very extreme scenario.

**5. Finally, finish by drying the chamber out with the brush and tissue paper as earlier and wiping the muzzle clean.**

With a very thorough cleaning process like this the first shot should still go in the group, but the velocity will be down 50 to 100fps. As we've polished it clean, smoothed the firecracking, and laid a coat of oil to finish the first projectile will slip down the bore with less resistance. You might think it will make it faster, but in fact there's less pressure and therefore less velocity, something to be mindful of if your first shot from a clean bore is a long one.

## CAN YOU OVERCLEAN YOUR RIFLE?

**It depends, if you were abrasive cleaning it every other day then you'd be slowly removing barrel steel.** And if it's a barrel that needs a few shots from a clean bore to settle down then you're just reducing the barrel life more than you'd save by cleaning it so often. If you're cleaning it properly then there's little risk, but if you're a little lazy about it and don't clean the ammonia out properly for example, then if any moisture is present combined with heat and pressure there is potential to create sulphuric acid which will etch even your stainless barrel if left to fester. So A, don't use an ammonia cleaner – get a bore scope and some KG12 between your group of mates, and B, if you do use ammonia, clean it out thoroughly.

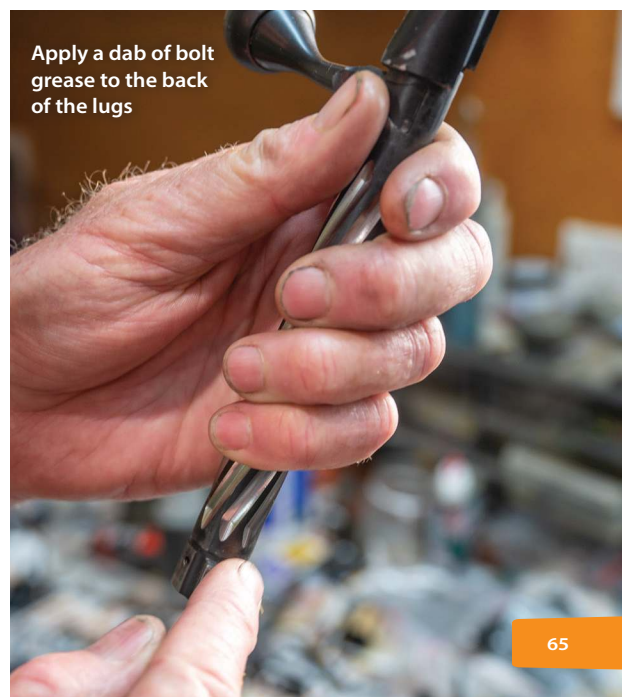
What we haven't dealt with are chrome-moly barrels. They have no corrosion resistance, so you'll need to clean them after every use or the carbon will attract moisture, even if just out of the air, and corrode the bore. Seriously just go and buy a stainless barreled rifle.

## OTHER BITS

**To look after the action and**



Wrapping tissue paper over a large brush to clean the chamber

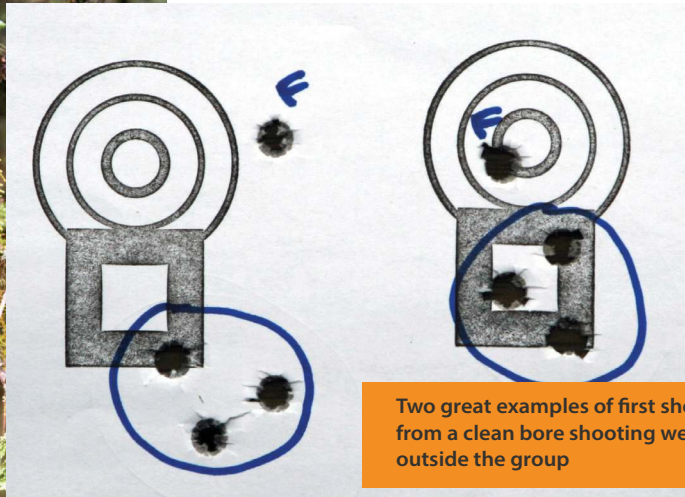


Apply a dab of bolt grease to the back of the lugs





Wet days in the bush over the roar mean it's probably time to give your rifle a clean



Two great examples of first shots from a clean bore shooting well outside the group

**stop any galling between the bolt lugs and their seats in the receiver you need to lube the lugs.** You need a moly-grease, or a specialist pro-shop bolt grease. A tiny dab on the back of the lugs is all you need.

If you've been getting it super wet and full of rubbish you could also need to disassemble the bolt and clean that out. This process is different for every bolt, but doesn't need to be done very often, so it could be one you save for a gunsmith.

Once it's apart, blast it all out with compressed air and then address any rust with CRC and steel wool.

Don't use a thick grease, in the cold it will slow down the action of the firing pin potentially leading to a misfire. Use something thin like Kroil or KG4, but use a very light coating. They're supposed to be dry so that they don't pick up any dust/grit.

The trigger assemblies are usually fairly bombproof, but give it a blast with compressed air. Sand is the only real killer,

so if you've been crawling around the dunes on Stewart Island then pull everything to bits and give it a very thorough blast out.

With free floated barrels (and in Greg's opinion every hunting rifle should have a free-floated barrel!) simply slide a patch under the barrel and work it backwards and forwards, slowly back to the action, freeing up any twigs or leaves wedged between.

**And that's about all there is to it! I'm sure most of our rifles could do with a bit of a birthday after a few wet days in the bush.**





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# KEEPING THE FAITH

WRITTEN BY  
JONATHAN FULTON

## Black arrived at our house as a little bundle of fur in January 2021

Bred by my friend Daniel, he was a full brother to my two other hunting dogs, Jazz and Hook. They are both smooth coated, whereas he is hairy, and with his crooked smile and red whiskers there was something immediately likeable about this ugly, affectionate wee pup. We nick-named him 'Redbeard'.

Jazz and Hook are both bailers. Relatively small dogs, but fast and nimble, they have grown up on a diet of hunting Northland pigs – characterised as generally small hogs that run like lightning, and aren't afraid to fight when backed into a corner. With age these pigs can grow

beautiful, trophy jaws. Being from the same line, Black was trained from a young age to bail pigs – not hold – and it was hoped he would fill a gap in the pack vacated by other dogs that had recently been forced into retirement by pig injuries.

His first hunts were not promising. Following mandatory kiwi aversion training, our forays into the steamy, subtropical native jungles in which we commonly hunt resulted in him backtracking all the way to the truck, then sitting there patiently hidden underneath the vehicle until we returned – sometimes hours later! Frustrating, but with a young dog

that is life! Realising his education was not going to be straightforward, my hunting-mate Zacque Price and myself were forced to put our patience caps on, lower our expectations and accept that even small gains were positives.

For a long time it felt like there were none. Returning to the truck midway through a hunt became a habit - which was fine as long as we were parked on private land, but on busy access tracks like Mokau Ridge in the Puketi-Omahuta Forest, with a constant procession of hunters driving past, this could lead to him being stolen. Many a time I would check my GPS unit from a remote part of the forest to make sure Black wasn't accelerating away in the dogbox of someone else's ute! This was

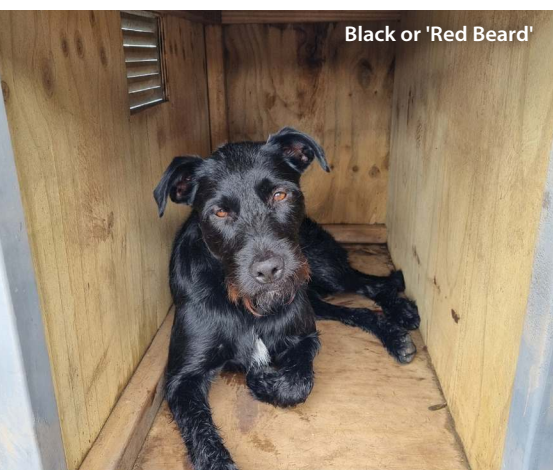




Zacque at a big wallow in the nīkau



The dogs on an old logging track



Black or 'Red Beard'

really quite stressful, but with no other pups to put the energy into, we were forced to plod away, take plenty of deep breaths and, most importantly when disciplining him, to never act in anger!

In August 2021 Black's progress was further stalled when he was bitten on the back leg by a large sow in a thick, entangled hollow of supplejack. The bruising he received quickly healed, but paled next to the psychological effects and, although he had started to hunt out in earnest by now, as soon as a pig was found he would quickly make a beeline back to us. He had become 'pig-shy'. **The only option was to stop hunting him in the hope that he would regain his confidence.**

For a self-confessed pig hunting fanatic, who loves nothing better than sneaking into a bail over steady dogs, the challenges that Black had thus far posed were cause for restless nights. The accumulated hours of training we had put into Black at ten months of age would number in the hundreds. By 'training' I

should clarify that this is mainly walking – mostly in native forest, tracking pigs. But it is still training in the sense that due to the Garmin dog-tracking system we use – as with all the dogs – his actions are constantly monitored, and they are encouraged for doing the 'right' things, and discouraged from doing what they are not meant to do.

**The shining light in these dark, troubled times was Black's older sister, Jazz.** At six years of age she was the mainstay, and continued to catch pigs, whether her youngest brother was present or not. Hook, at two years of age slowly improved, so with two dogs we soldiered on. Jazz's style and charisma – as well as her beautiful loyalty – often brought a smile to my face, and the bond we share is one of the highlights of my pighunting career. So while the two younger dogs were finding their feet, Jazz did the lion's share of the work, and in doing so deflected a lot of negative attention away from her brothers. Looking back, if it wasn't for her Black would probably not still be in our kennels!

Around November 2021 Black started to come out hunting with us again. He soon showed that three months of almost no work had done him no harm, and he slowly started to gain confidence. His finding distance gradually increased, and his bailing distance from the pig decreased as he matured. There were no breakthrough hunts, just very small steps, generally in the right direction!

**On December 16th 2021, Zacque and I were on the road in the dark to a favourite haunt, hoping to catch a pig before the day heated up.** As day broke, we trudged our way up a clay track west of Kaeo, intent on reaching a valley

of nīkau palms before the rising sun. True to the time of year, the palms were covered in clusters of red berries. The ripe ones had fallen, and pig sign showed they had been hoovered up overnight like a native lolly scramble. Jazz, Hook and Black tracked off, and our hopes of a quick find were soon gone as the tracker indicated the three dogs going over the top of a mountain 900 metres away. We lost all communication with them, and had no choice but to start climbing to the top. **Full of uncertainty, 40 minutes later we stood on the highest point, surrounded by native forest, and picked up all three 400 metres down below us, bailing their hearts out, in a patch of thick scrub off the side of a native ridge.**

As we closed in to the bail through tight 'pencil' mānuka and totara, we noticed Jazz and Hook were the steadying ships, but Black had stuck to task and, although slightly wider than the other two, was making plenty of noise, and hadn't thrown the towel in. Hearts thumping, only metres away in tight regenerating native, we couldn't get a clear view of what the dogs had, but luckily Jazz controlled the bail, and eventually one shot had a trophy pig with thick, polished ivories on the ground and quiet handshakes shared. This hunt marked another very small step in Blacks progression – he helped to find it, he didn't catch it or keep it there, but he stuck to task and did enough for us to keep the faith.

That faith would be sorely tested two weeks later. Black had caught his first small pig, bailing it with uncontrollable excitement until we saw that it was only slightly larger than a rabbit, so that was





Zacque and the trophy boar from December 2021



Black, Jazz, Zacque and my daughter Eva

a small high! **But on 31st December he wasn't with us when Zacque, my daughter Eva and son Shyne – on leave from work in the South Island – climbed an abandoned clay forestry track in the semi darkness of early dawn, on the search for pigs.** Less than an hour from the truck, Jazz found and stopped a boar on the edge of said track, and as we closed in on the bail, Zacque ready to shoot, Jazz was ripped and her stomach and liver fell out as Eva and I pounced on her to minimize the damage. Luckily it happened right in front of us, and we were able to pin her down in seconds so her intestines and

the fatty tissues lining her stomach weren't torn. Hook and the pig forgotten, many tears were shed as we waited for the worst pig inflicted injury I have seen to overcome my dog. But Shyne – a trained medic – had other ideas and somehow managed to bundle everything up, keep her liver damp and gently but forcefully get her out of the bush and to help without struggling. She is still with us today, a minor miracle on so many counts, but the summer of 2022 was dedicated to recovery, and as autumn approached the two young dogs were forced to do it all on their own. **Black – as usual – took some steps forward and some steps back.**

One definite forward step was his growing ability to squirrel off on his own and find – but not always catch – a pig. On a memorable hunt in June, Hook and Jazz had chosen to track up the left hand side of a small, wet, native gully, whereas Black had followed his nose up a tight parataniwha and ponga lined

side creek. **Watching him closely on the tracker, he remained stationary for several minutes and a growing suspicion that he had found a pig had us purposefully climbing towards him as quickly and quietly as possible.** One lone distant bark had Jazz rocketing away, and as my hairy black dog came down to find me, my smooth-coated bitch passed him and somehow intercepted a gray boar as it made its escape down the steep creek. All I can assume is that Black had snuck in and found it asleep, eyeballed it and realized it was big and scary, plucked up the bravery to bark then scarpered! As usual Jazz had saved the day and probably Black's bacon!

I put Black's timid nature down to a lack of maturity, and only hoped that he would become mentally tougher. Looking at his siblings – dogs I owned or that other hunters had – there was no 'soft' streak, so it made sense that he would harden up, but it was still extremely difficult to see it playing out.

**Now that he wasn't a hindrance, Black came on every hunt, but it was time – not pigs – that helped his development.** He simply gained maturity with age, and we saw the difference both in his home life and his hunting life. Around the kennels he settled down, barked less and listened more. He started to do what my older dogs had always done, and conserve his energy for hunting, not playing. He became more affectionate, and he listened more. But probably the biggest change was that he seemed to want to please. This is a hard one to summarise in words, but the loyalty of a good dog often only truly seen in the darkest of times. It is only in the last eight months that Black's loyalty has started to come to the fore.

On an afternoon hunt in August, Zacque and I were out on the hill after three days of flooding in Kao and the Far North, searching for a boar. It was a grey, leaden day, when the native bush seemed dark



Zacque's own trophy boar



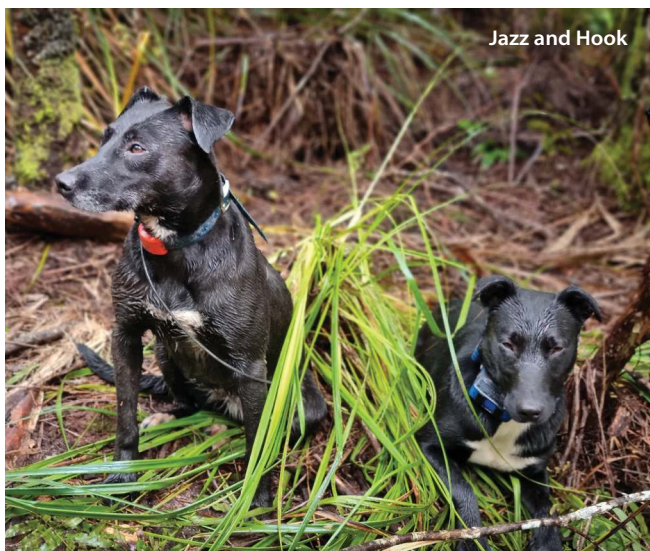


Black's first solo boar

and uninviting, and all signs of animals were washed away, save for the fresh dog and boot prints in the thick yellow clay. Black tracked off on his own, and in his usual tedious way he meandered up a scrubby native face, doing small circles and loops on the tracker in his wandering. **Jazz and Hook stood patiently by our feet, only mildly interested that he was gone.** What exactly happened next we don't know, but whether he put it to flight or it was already up and feeding, the three dogs converged in a steep pampas-lined bluff and caught a boar as it made its escape. Zacque snuck in and shot it on the bail, and only when it was on the ground did I get to see it. Big chipped tusks and grinders, fighting scars, lean and mean with an oversized head disproportionate to its body, and teeth ground flat from years of eating the fibrous hearts and berries of nikau palms, it was a true Northland native boar in every sense. So, on a bleak, wet day when there was very little else to celebrate this pig – and more importantly the way the dogs had performed – put a smile on our faces, and Zacque had his biggest trophy tusks to date.

**The remainder of 2022 flew by in a whirlwind of family time, work deadlines, southern bull tahr trips, and some pig hunting – which wasn't without its usual dramas.**

Zacque and I nearly lost Black when a tusk hole in his neck severed an artery. Victim of another small, lightning fast boar that literally jumped off a waterfall to evade capture. We accept that even the most nimble, wary bailing dogs get caught out at times by these skinny, mature pigs with an iron grip on life.



Jazz and Hook

There are two hunts of note this year which summarise the growth of this young dog who for 18 months of his life (at least) I had all but given up on, but now at two and a half years old is the main finder and catcher in the pack. The first was him catching his first mature boar solo on the last day of January, and keeping it there for the time it took Jazz to hone in on his frantic barking, around ten minutes. The second was only recently on Anzac Day, when he outshone an ageing Jazz on a hunt that took Zacque and I by surprise.

Taking the dogs to Dawn Service was definitely a first for me, but meant I could meet Zacque in Kaeo shortly after daylight for a hunt. Hook was injured, so it was Black and Jazz that ran up the track ahead of us, scouting around for fresh signs of pigs. **Pushing through dense gorse interspersed with pockets of totara trees, we eventually crossed a stream that bubbled out of a steep native valley, and here the dogs left us.** Watching the tracker closely, they climbed the opposite face of predominantly taraire, puriri and kahikatea trees, then looped around and drifted out into much tighter mānuka, pampas and gorse. I was disappointed when the two split up, but they hadn't given up, and seemed to be taking different routes to the same small scrub-choked gully. It was Black's aggressive



Owner - Allan Foot

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stopping bark that rang out first, and in a short while Jazz chimed in, and the two of them were soon singing.

Taking a roundabout route to the bail, we literally crawled in under 'old man' gorse and Zacque shot the boar at close range on the edge of a creek. Solid and mature with fighting tusks to match, it wasn't until we stuck him that we saw the damage another boar had done to him – solid rips in his back legs and one in his side that had caused his intestines to bubble out. The wound was fresh, and it was good to end any pain he may have been suffering.

Gutted and tied up, we picked our way painstakingly out of a wall of solid gorse, climbed to the top ridge and carefully wedged our pig under a tiny waterfall to keep the flies away. **The day was still young, and the dogs keen, so we decided to push on.**

More climbing, and we eventually stood in a clearing, looking down on hundreds of acres of native bush and scrub laid out in a giant basin. Jazz seemed content with her efforts for the day, but Black had disappeared, and the GPS showed him to be tracking steadily to the top of a steep knoll above us. Very close to the crest, his progress had slowed right down, and the screen indicated that at times he wasn't moving at all. It was the highest point for a long way around us, and we surmised that anything he found would have to come down. And it did. **We heard nothing of the initial find, but thanks to technology we knew he had hurtled down the steep face and crossed our elevation 200 metres in front of us.**

At the first flat plateau – a large kahikatea swamp – we heard him stop the pig, and settle into a deep, steady bail. Jazz took the direct route to him, and the two had only just settled into their work when



Nasty stuff for bailers!

the pig broke.

The next stop was a long way away, in the very bottom of the giant basin, and twenty minutes of slipping, sliding, ducking and diving had us finally closing in on a boar that was doing everything he possibly could to keep moving. **The two dogs were having trouble containing him, and now, in waist-high fern interlaced with dead mānuka trunks, the job had become trickier.** At the earliest opportunity a shot was taken as the pig walked up a run surrounded by native rushes, and luckily it connected. We had our boar but, as Zacque stuck the knife into him, our celebrations were muted. Black had been caught out and was very sore, but he had stuck to the job, and in doing so taken another small step in the right direction.

Black is well on the way to full recovery from his Anzac Day ordeal. He is itching to get out in the bush again, and I can't wait to hunt him. **He has learnt a lot in his short, intense life, but he has probably taught me more, namely the art of patience!**



Zacque and Jazz with the Anzac Day boar

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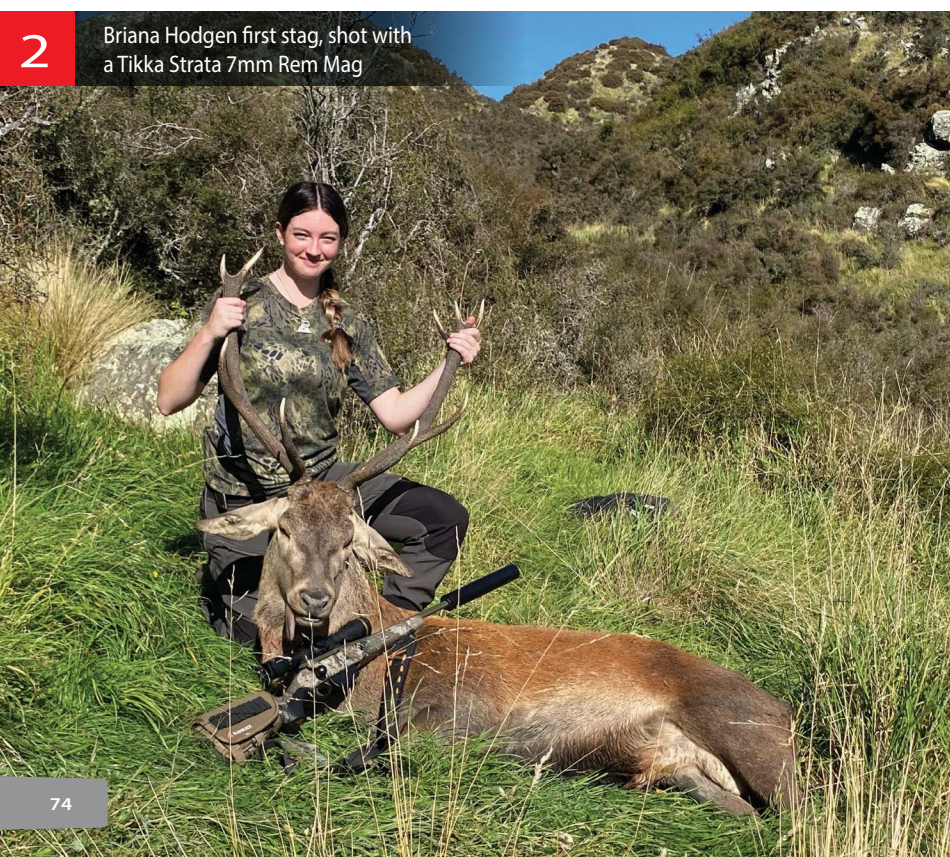
# Gallery

## WINNER



1

Cullen (9) and Quinn (6) Collie with Cullen's North Canterbury 12 pointer from the 2023 roar taken with a Tikka T3x in 6.5 Creedmoor



2

Briana Hodgen first stag, shot with a Tikka Strata 7mm Rem Mag

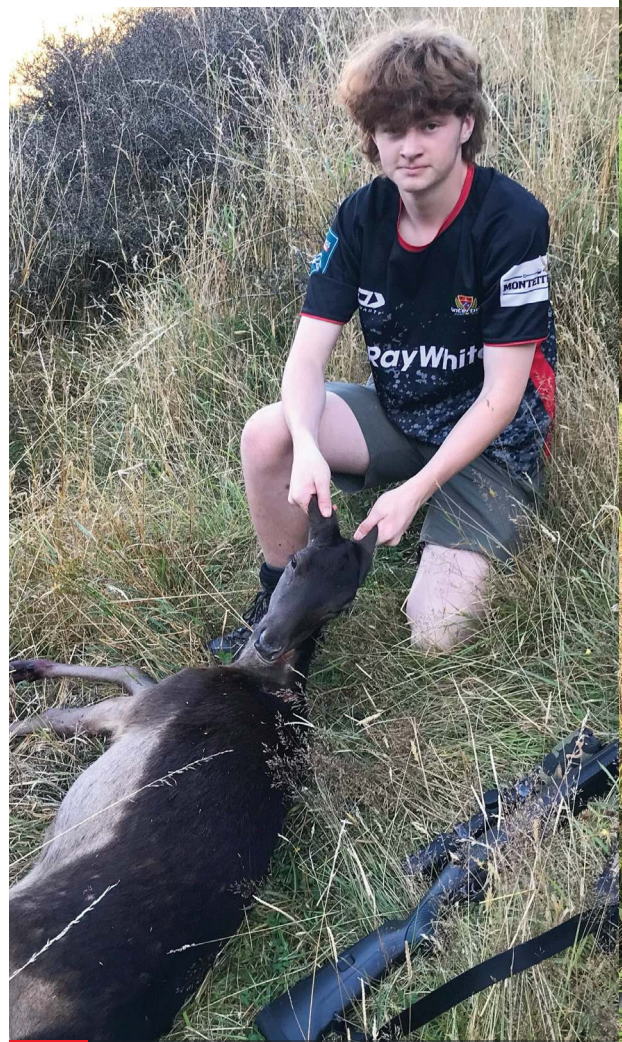


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*Firearm used must be shown in photo*



3

Shaun Marshall (15) shot his first Fallow deer with a Sako 85 308. He was very 'chuffed'!



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Luca Earl (11) with his first Red stag, shot with Dad's Tikka T3 308, shot right on dark in the roar

4



Hayden Whinn (13) shot this awesome Sambar stag after patiently waiting for four and a half hours till he finally gave Hayden a chance for a good clean shot

5



6

Joe Moulder (11) shot his first Fallow buck with his Dad's Tikka T3 270



7

Flynn Blair (9) with his first deer, a Fallow, taken just before dark with a Tikka 308



Charlie Ford (8) hunting for the first time in the roar, with a stag shot with a T3 7mm-08 on public land, Southland

8



WRITTEN BY  
CAM MCKAY | POINTS SOUTH

# TEICHELMANN CREEK

## TAHR BALLOT BLOCKS

Joseph and Craig on  
the ridge below camp

**Born in Australia but of German ancestry Ebenezer Teichlemann took the post of local doctor in Hokitika in 1897**

**Between 1899 and 1924, Teichlemann recorded 26 first ascents of mountains and seven first crossings of passes, cols, or saddles.**

He was also a prolific photographer that dragged the extremely heavy cameras of the era along on his journeys, and today a collection of more than 600 of these images is held in the MacMillan Brown Collection of the University of Canterbury. So, it is hardly surprising that there are a number of peaks, passes, and creeks named after him as well as a monument in Hokitika.

**Teichlemanns Creek is located near the head of the Perth Valley in the Adams wilderness area,** and right on the main divide where, with a bit of effort, you could climb up and look down into the head of the Havelock to the East. You also get a reasonable view of the Garden of Eden ice plateau as it drops off into Abel Lake.

The campsite sits at about 1500m on a ridge, and would be one of the most exposed campsites of all the tahr ballot landing sites. It's particularly exposed

to anything from the South West, so it pays to keep a good eye on the forecast as it would not be a fun place to ride out a storm from that direction. **There is**

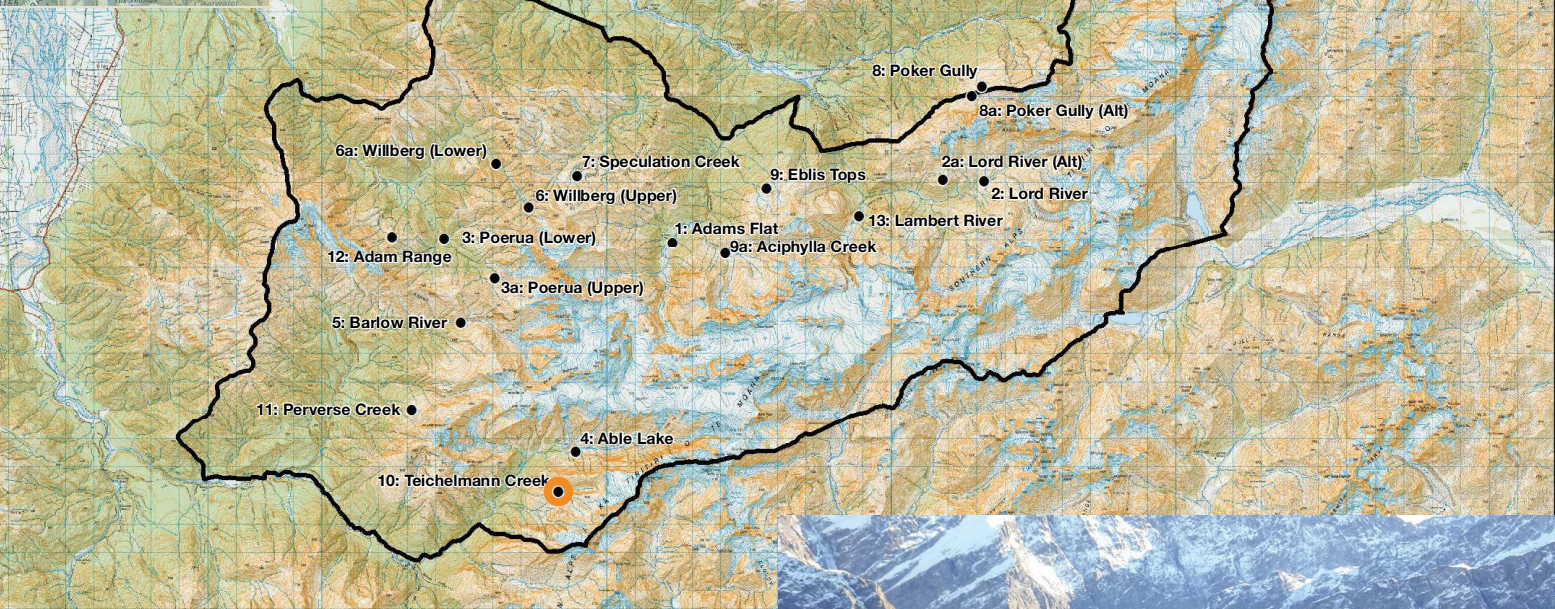
**however a bit of a rough bivvy rock just below camp that would help if things really got bad.**

There's also a ZIP hut located on a bench above the Perth River some 700m below, this is only available to DOC staff for monitoring the extensive trap system they have through this area. From what I'm hearing the kea have had a couple of good nesting seasons as a result of the ZIP work. But with that comes a bunch more juvenile kea that like nothing more than a messy campsite to wreak havoc on.

Looking across  
to the Garden of  
Eden from camp  
Tim Norris







So keep your camp tidy and don't create a game for them by throwing things or you will find they will hassle you all week.

**There's a bunch of good hunting below camp at the top of the scrub line,** but you will also see animals on the opposite side of Teichlemanns Creek both high in steep bluff systems and low in the dense scrub. There's also hunting to the North in Tarn Creek, just some people might

find accessing it a bit of a challenge.

With camp being at 1500 meters, it's almost a given that you will be dealing with snow, even in May.

**And from June on there's every chance you'll be dealing with getting around on wet or frozen snow, so make sure you've got the right tools to deal with this.**



Camp ridge from above

  
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# JACKO FLAT HUT

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Jacko Flat Hut

**Jacko Flat Hut is located midway up the true left of Crooked River on the flat of the same name. The Crooked is a largish frontal valley in central Westland that drains into Lake Brunner (Moana) east of Greymouth**

The hut vistas are dominated by the towering northern faces of Mt Alexander whose bush covered slopes bordering the flat taper rapidly to sheer rock. There are two gorges in the lower Crooked and the track to the hut is rough and undulating. It's not the easiest of walks and the state of the track is not ideal currently. At the moment a fit party would need to allow a good 5-6 hours to reach the hut from the roadend.

Upstream of Jacko Flat the river settles down somewhat and the terrain becomes gentler with more open flats. Top Crooked Hut at the head of the valley is only a couple of hours further up from Jacko Flat.

The Crooked has always been a fairly low-

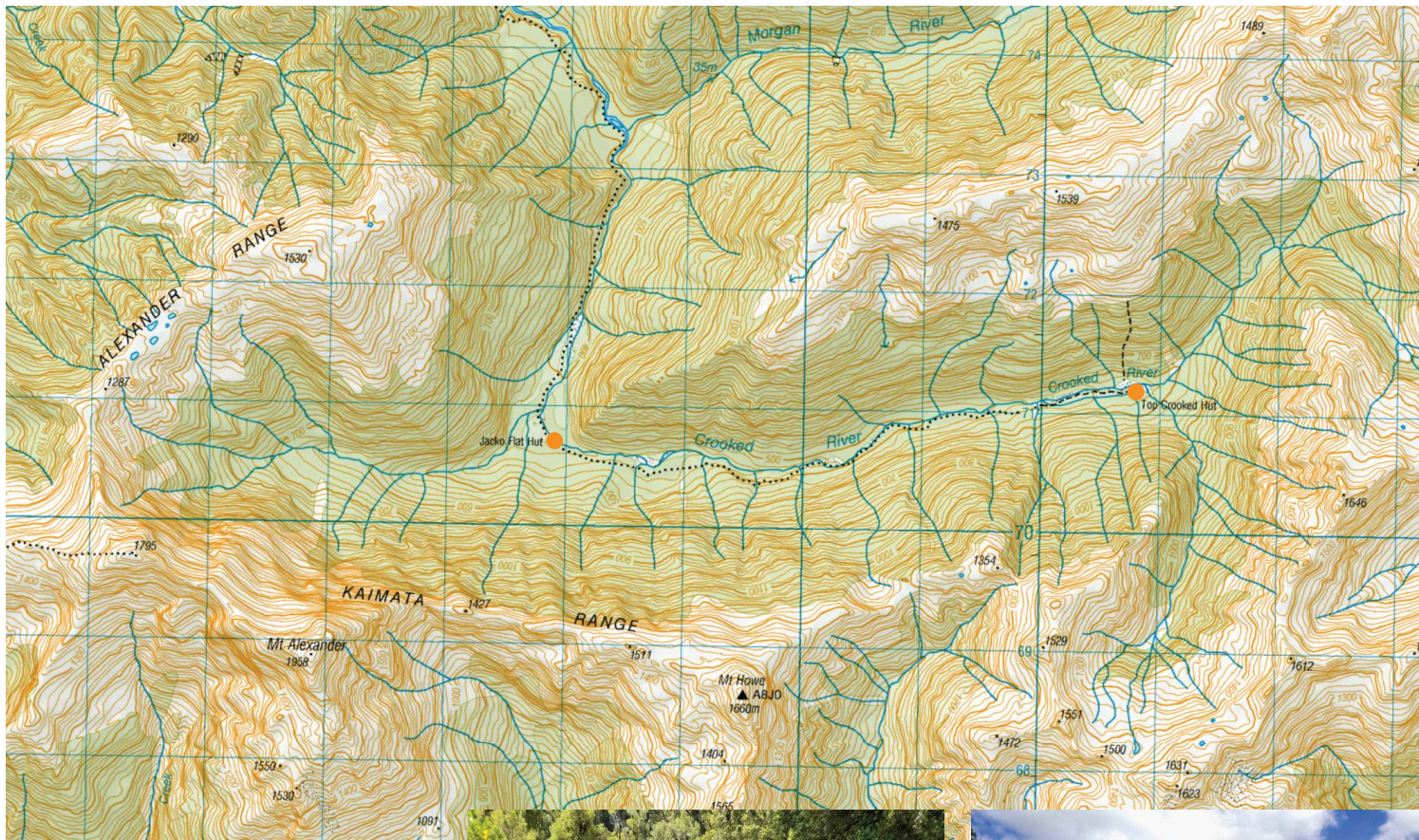
use valley, with visitor numbers declining further in the 90's and early 2000's due to unmaintained and overgrowing tracks. DOC Greymouth did manage a bit of work on them in 2009, 2015, and 2019, but the Department currently doesn't have anything in its operating budget

to do anything in the short term. They recently indicated that they would be happy for the Permolat Group to take the Jacko Flat track on as a project. In the meantime, I and others have flag-taped some of the more overgrown bits of the trail.

**Jacko Flat has remained consistently low use over the decades, averaging around 10 parties a year.** There has been increased interest in recent times from those doing a circuit around the spectacular Lake Morgan tops and back down the Morgan Range to the Crooked carpark. Visitors to the hut regularly report hearing kiwi close by and in past times parts of the flat have looked a bit like a cattle yard with the amount of deer sign. Suffice to say this is no longer so, but animals still venture out regularly, albeit in lower numbers. The other interesting thing about the Crooked Valley is that it is on the border of what is known







as the beech gap. During the last ice age glaciers extended to the ocean and scraped all the vegetation off the land's surface. Beech was the dominant species prior to this but is much slower to recolonize than other tree species, because its seeds are not airborne or eaten and transported by birds. **The border between the advancing beech and the rata/kamahi forest that has ruled the roost for the last 10,000 years is quite visible in several parts of the valley.**

Jacko Flat is a standard New Zealand Forest Service S70 six-bunk design with an open fireplace that was built in the 1960's. The interior walls and ceiling were lined at some point and one of the door cupboards removed to create more space. There is a wooden plaque on the wall incised with "NZFS Hall of Fame" and the names of those who worked on the hut and tracks in the 1970's.

The last DOC maintenance on Jacko Flat was carried out in 2015. It is unlikely however, given the current climate of underfunding, that DOC will be giving Jacko Flat much attention in the short or medium term. The hut's original and untreated piles are past their best-by date and there are several damp patches around the hearth, adjacent to window flashings, and around the door stud. Permolat dropped some treated piles there in 2017 that weren't used on a Top Crooked project. Along with re-piling and sub-floor work there is the option of a major overhaul a la Back Country



Lower Crooked Gorge



Mt Alexander from the Crooked River

Trust (BCT) which usually involves roof replacement, and replacement of the original louvre windows with single pane ones. **Unfortunately, the BCT may have ended its golden run with the powers that be.** At the time of writing this it hadn't yet managed to secure its yearly allocation of dosh that will allow it to continue the amazing work it's been doing on back country huts around the country over the past few years. The most pressing issue however is that of getting the route up from the road in better shape.

**Permolat may be able to pull something out of the bag this year, but if anyone in the hunting fraternity is**

**interested and has the energy, we still have access to a bit of BCT funding for trackwork if they want to do this for us.**

Jacko Flat is your quintessential FS hut with its open fire and remote ambiance and the Crooked valley is another of the many underrated and infrequently visited spots in the New Zealand high country. The terrain may be a bit challenging but if you can handle that there is something for everyone up there, whether you are a hunter or not.

**More comprehensive route information can be found on <https://www.remotehuts.co.nz/jacko-flat-hut.html>**



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GWYN THURLOW - NZDA



Image by Gerald Fluerty

## **Fallow Deer** **Dama dama**

**Male = Buck**

**Female = Doe**

**Young = Fawn**

First brought to New Zealand in 1853, there have been numerous liberations of fallow deer all over the country. Today, they have a patchy but widespread (and increasing) distribution, being found on both public and private land. Fallow deer are the second most hunted species of deer in New Zealand, beaten only by the red deer, but is that order changing due to the prevalence of fallow deer?.

## **Characteristics & Behaviour:**

Fallow are a medium-sized deer. Bucks usually reach up to 1m at the shoulder, and weigh up to 90kg; does are smaller, standing up to 85cm at the shoulder and weighing up to 55kg. For most of the year, fallow deer tend to form mobs of single sexes, mixing only just prior to and during the rut (which occurs during April). During the rut, bucks will accumulate a harem of females, and rather than roaring like a sika or red, they instead "croak". The croak of a rutting fallow buck is quite unique, and has been described as similar to the grunt of a pig, or even the burp of a human.

Fallow are known for being creatures of habit, and are often very localised, rarely leaving

the general area of their birth. This behaviour has resulted in the spread of fallow being relatively slow, even after being introduced for the first time into fresh habitat. This is the reason for the patchy distribution of fallow around New Zealand – each patch essentially represents the general areas of initial liberations.

## **Fur Variations:**

Perhaps one of the most unique features of fallow deer is their wide range of coat colours. There are four main variations: "common" (ginger-brown with white-cream spotting), "menil" (a paler version of common), "white", and "forest breed" (black with a dark grey belly). Of course, there is a large number of rarer and intermediate colour variations as well. In New Zealand, the most common colour of fallow deer is "forest breed", or black phase. This is due to the high proportion of black fallow that were first introduced into New Zealand during the liberation and acclimatisation days.

## **Gigantic Ancestors:**

Fallow deer are the only surviving descendant of *Megaloceros giganteus* (or "Irish Elk"), a giant prehistoric deer that stood approximately 2.1m at the shoulder and carried antlers up to 3.6m wide. This is why fallow deer have palmated antlers and can not crossbreed with other deer species (unlike reds, sika and wapiti, which can all crossbreed). They are more closely related to these ice-age giants than any of the other species alive today.

## **What is a trophy?**

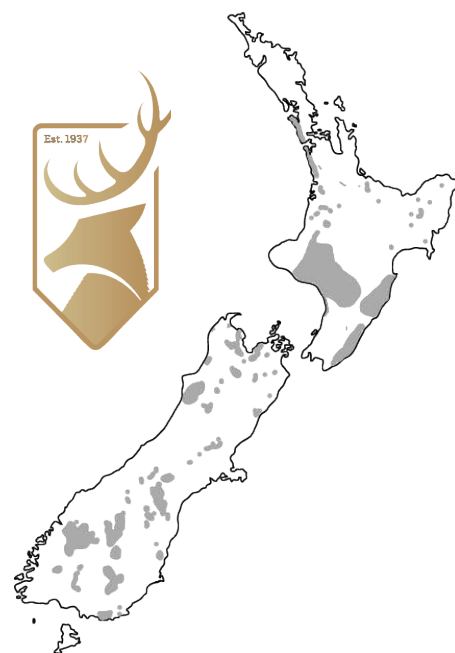
To be entered in the NZDA Record Books, a fallow buck needs a Douglas Score of at least 200 DS. The current NZ record is 289 2/8 DS, taken by Adrian Ashby at McCaughley Valley in 2015.

## **Further Reading:**

Banwell, D. Bruce (2003). *The Fallow Deer*. The Halcyon Press.

Donne, T.E. (1924). *The Game Animals of New Zealand*. John Murray, London.

Egan, Howard (2015). *Hunting Fallow Deer in New Zealand*. David Bateman Ltd.







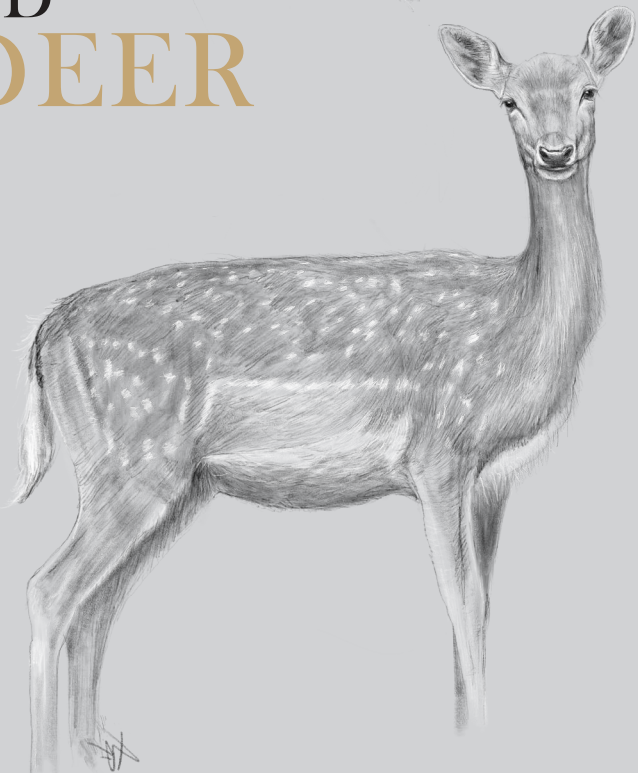
BUCK



DRAWN BY ~ FRANCESCO FORMISANO

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# KEEN YOUNG LADS

WRITTEN BY ~ JONATHAN SPENCE

## My wife Laura and I headed up to our friend's farm on a Sunday evening

After catching up with Paul, his family, and a few other good friends, Joe, Adrian, Carl, Vaughn and my brothers Peter and David, we hatched a quick plan and then headed to bed. We were awaiting the arrival of a bunch of keen young lads coming out to the farm for a few days of learning how to hunt, take the meat, process and cook it.

Monday consisted of getting ready for the week and taking the lads out target shooting, wrestling matches on the wool fadges, a hearty feed and cooking up a plan for the morning.

Once out the door next day we headed up to the valley that we were to hunt. The other group were deer hunting and headed up a ridge while Joe, the three boys and I headed along the track up the valley. **Joe spotted a few deer, so we started up toward the ridge that we were to climb up along.** We hadn't even gone half a kilometre from the truck when I picked up a young stag 400 metres away on the ridge where the other group were heading. We tried to radio them but without any luck. So after showing the young fellas where he was, we carried on. Climbing up a little further we reached a spot where we could look into the head of a small

gully. While the others glassed up the valley, I told Joe I would have a peek over into it. **There wasn't much to see so I turned around and headed back.** I hadn't walked 20 metres before I heard something behind me, and turning, I saw a couple hinds just 15 metres away, already moving off. I quickly knocked an arrow, but they were out of sight. Just then a couple more came trotting out and a stag followed, but they kept moving. I gave a yell to Joe and the boys, but by the time they got there and Joe had set up the .270, the deer were starting to head over a knob and moving closer to the neighbour's place. The stag was the last one and stopped, but he was on the skyline and covered by a matagouri bush. I thought he had escaped, but a hawk spooked out of the bush which in turn spooked the



stag, who trotted back around onto the face of the hill broadside. **Joe, being the decent bloke he is, made a comment about getting one of the kids a shot but I told him to take it.** I could see the impact hitting and the stag only went a few metres; we were stoked to say the least to have an animal down.

Once up there Joe set about teaching and showing the lads how to gut and clean the deer. Meanwhile I had the spotter out and picked up a mob right up the head of the valley. So with the stag dealt to and tucked in the shade, we headed off up the hill. After a good slog we were just about at the top of the mountain and about to cut around onto the deer when up jumped a bull tahr not 20 metres away, startling us all. He hopped over the rocks out of sight. Running to the top of the rocks I saw him standing about 50 or so metres away. I was wishing I could try and take a shot but Paul, the owner, had asked us to leave it. So, we took a couple of pics and admired him; and boy - he looked nice! Ever since I started bow hunting, taking a trophy bull with a bow has been my dream.

**After he disappeared we stalked around onto the mob of deer and, while trying to setting up one of the young lads on my 7mm-08, the deer started spooking.**

However, a spiker 200 metres away a little down the hill from the rest gave us a chance, and once he was on it, only one shot was required from the young lad. It was pretty sweet to see him take his first deer. It is a special thing to be a part of and to see the emotions of joy and success alongside the gratitude and respect of taking an animal.

I took a yearling at 350 metres for a bit of nice meat, as by then the opportunity of getting a shot for one of the other boys was long gone. Helping the young fella to make a pack out of the hind quarters we took the backsteaks and fillets while Joe carried my previous kill out. Like I said, a top bloke! Once back on the track we were grateful to hear Paul say over the radio he was on his way with the farm truck.

**After meeting Paul part way, we relaxed and enjoyed a beautiful late afternoon and glassing some more, we were a bit surprised to spot a couple hinds 500 metres away.** Then a stag came walking back around the ridge above us up near where we had been. We walked back up to move around the face towards where we had last seen them and, sure

enough, up they hopped. Setting up the other two young fellas they let rip and we soon had two more stags on the deck! Two more firsts as neither of the lads had shot a deer before.

With the deer back at the truck and after a few pictures and enjoying a stunning sunset, we started back. We hadn't gone too far before Paul spotted the tahr again about 200 metres away. Having heard us talking about it earlier and knowing that the neighbours were getting a chopper in to manage the deer numbers, and figuring that if they saw the tahr they would shoot it, he offered me a crack.

**Being a little surprised and double checking that I was hearing right** I excitedly grabbed the bow, and I quietly took my boots off so that I could sneak up in my socks!

He was under a small bluff so I slipped back up the track out of sight, headed around the face above him and planned to sneak down from the top. But as I got to the bluff I spotted him another 150 metres away looking back at me. Feeling gutted and realising that I wasn't going to get in on him I was about to give up, but one last minute thought



Joe with his stag along with Jayden, Lochie and Mathias



Mathias with his spiker



Jayden with his stag





The first time seeing the bull



popped into my head that might just work. I slipped back out of sight and ran up the hill a few hundred metres. Hunched up and moving around the face at a steady pace above him, I was hoping that he would think I was moving through and that he wouldn't run off. Once out of sight, I headed down until I was about at the level that I had last seen him. **As I was slowly stalking around the face I saw him briefly move around out of sight in the middle of a bluff.** He seemed unaware of where I was and not too bothered, so I crept down. Taking care not to make noise by catching my feet on the tussock I carefully snuck in along the little bench in the bluff and slowly peeked around. There he was, laying down, facing away. Peering around with the rangefinder I found he was 14 metres away - the buzz was making me a bit shaky now! I took a few breaths and tried to calm down then drew back and stepped around the corner. Settling the 10 metre pin a little up the shoulder I released the shot. It hit a bit lower than I would have liked, and he jumped up and ran out of sight. I nocked another arrow and looked over the edge of the little bluff below me and saw him at about the same distance. I tried to take another shot, but leaning out in the fading light I struggled to make a good shot. The bull ran out the bottom and stopped 70 metres away.

**He was getting hard to make out, so I called the others.** Joe was sent down with a gun in case he needed finishing as I was more concerned about making sure he died quickly than killing him with only the bow. A minute or so after calling, I heard some thrashing around below where he was. I prayed that it was him kicking his last.

By the time Joe got to me it was really starting to get dark so he gave me the gun and I headed down. We could smell him as we got close and sure enough he was lying dead, head first in some scrub. Feeling a lot better now that we had him, knowing that he hadn't gone far and



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that he had been dead for a bit was a big relief.

Trying to pull him from the bush was a mission and grabbing a horn in the scrub to pull him free I let out a whoop as there was no doubt it was a good head. After taking a few photos we set about skinning it and taking off the head as there was no meat on him. **It was incredible how emaciated he was, and I don't think that he would have made it through the winter.** Paul had taken the young fellas back earlier, so we climbed back up to the track, found my pack and boots, and started the trek back to my truck. It was an awesome walk. I was feeling so stoked to have been able to see a good mate shoot a royal stag, the young lads shoot their first



Super grateful to be able to take such an amazing animal.

15" on the long side

deer, and to take this big bull! Boy, there was a lot to be grateful for while walking back looking at the stars. With the bull measuring 14 <sup>7/8</sup>" on the short side and 15 on the long side and scoring 46 DS it really was a monster; bigger than I had even dreamed of, let alone a record book bull on the bow. He is the largest on record for a bow as far as I can find. The rest of the week was pretty epic too - sneaking within 15-20 metres of some

pigs and shooting a couple. A bunch of the lad took goats, a few other pigs, some rabbits and hares while spotlighting. All up, it was a special few days, and it was great to see the young lads break down the animals and cook them for dinner. **We were also able to send them home with a bunch of meat. It really was a treat to watch them get out and enjoy the mountains and valleys.**



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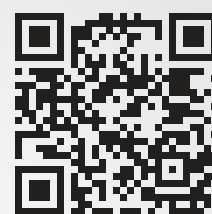
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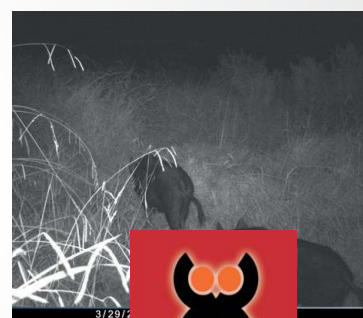
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WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

# RIDGELINE 4K TRAIL CAMERA

## Ridgeline have been branching out in recent times

Supplying not only apparel, but now binoculars and trail cameras.

The new trail camera caught my eye as it comes in very cheap at only \$200, so when Ridgeline offered one to review I jumped at the chance.

It arrived just in time for the roar, perfect I thought! There was no time to get too familiar with it, it needed to get in the hills asap. Local lad Josh Coles and I set it up on a wallow with high hopes of hundreds of stag photos. When Josh went to collect it a month later we discovered that we hadn't turned it on properly .... the slide button from 'off' to 'setup' to 'on' doesn't have a very positive click. **Be sure to wait until you see the five second countdown beginning before you set it up and disappear for a month like we did!!**

In the weeks since we've been able to play with it a bit more, and there are a whole lot of features I really like. The front

facing screen is an absolute winner, it makes fine tuning your placement so easy and they've used a nice big 2" LCD screen and sizeable buttons that aren't too fiddly with cold wet fingers.

**I also think it's great that it only swings open the bottom third, meaning there's a smaller seal to succumb to water and dust.** The top of the seal is protected by the body of the camera, meaning it should be exceedingly waterproof and lends credibility to the IP66 waterproofing rating. In addition to this, the battery pack slides out the bottom with the terminals right at the top, meaning any moisture that does get in and sits at the base of the unit shouldn't effect it.

The operating system is a little clunky, it takes a few seconds to fire up and there's a mild delay responding to buttons in the



menu but you do have to remember it's a very cost-effective camera, there have to be some compromises.

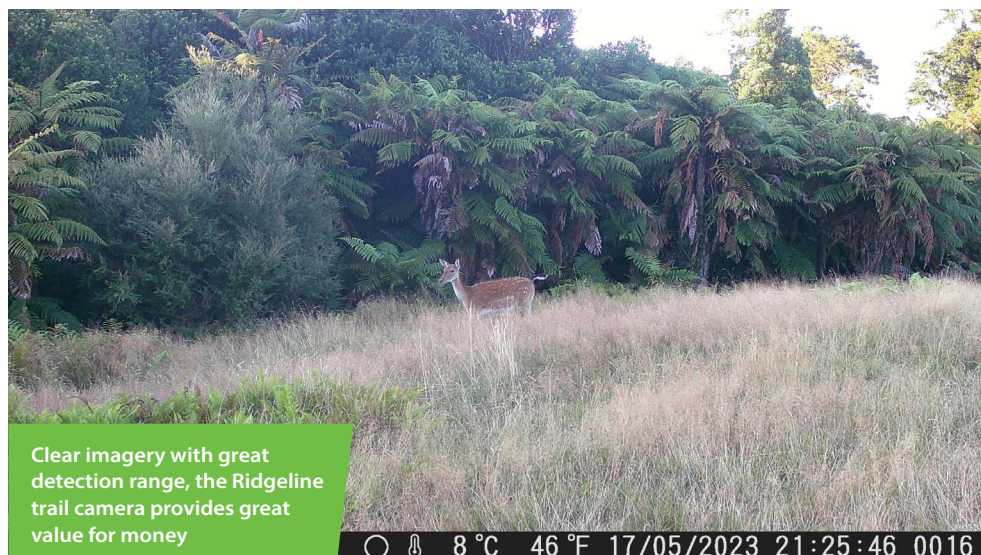
To simplify the setup system they've made it so that you have to cycle through the available modes every time you set it up, it starts on the 4K video, so if you're more interested in the photos like me you have to remember to cycle through before setting it to 'on'.

It has a fast trigger speed at only 0.4s, meaning you can set it on trickier sites and not worry about only catching half of an animal as it moves across the frame.

Despite the claims of 24mp I found the photo quality fairly typical of an entry level camera, with pretty average dynamic range but it did have great sharpness. Also the surface of the lens fogged with daytime temp changes and mist quite easily, it could be because the lens isn't very recessed in the body, but those are tricky conditions for any camera.

The detection range is great, but the night time IR lamp had a reasonably short range, animals were only illuminated to about 8 metres.

**This camera is an extremely cost effective solution that is capable of a number of applications. It is very light and compact, provides clear photos and video and should stand up to NZ weather!**



Clear imagery with great detection range, the Ridgeline trail camera provides great value for money

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# PUREORA

## HUNTING COMPETITION

WRITTEN BY ~ ALLAN JACKSON

### The question: Are there any effects from the Covid disruptions over the last 3 years?

The low number of entries is probably from the loss of momentum of the competition due to the previous cancellations.

The slight drop in the average age of Harvest in 2021 and 2023 could suggest there are more young stags around, but the following graph suggests it is more likely there are fewer older stags in the herd.

Average jaw size has remained boringly consistent. The largest jaw is an anomaly. This stag was only 40 months old and has a jaw size similar to a Fiordland Wapiti type animal. Escapee?

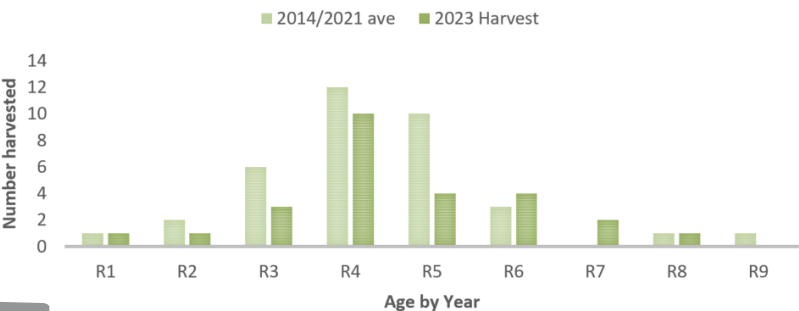
And again the Oldest Stag column has remained consistent at

### Pureora Stag Statistics

Year	Total	Ave Age/ months	Ave Jaw	Largest Jaw	Oldest Stag
2014	51	52	295mm	315mm	10yrs
2015	32	59	290mm	325mm	9yrs
2016	39	53	296mm	317mm	8yrs
2017	44	52	295mm	330mm	8yrs
2018	51	50	294mm	325mm	9yrs
2019	43	52	295mm	315mm	6yrs
2021	47	48	298mm	325mm	7 yrs
2023	28	49	293mm	345mm	8 yrs
Total/ave	335	52	295mm	325mm	8yrs

around 8 years. Red stags reach antler maturity at 8/10 years of age. **Old animals are very rare in this herd due to the hunting pressure.**

### PUREORA HUNTING COMPETITION 2014/2021 AVE/2023 HARVEST



This graph was built to see if the 2023 harvest of stags showed any change in the deer population over Covid.

The 2014/2021 results were averaged and graphed alongside the 2023 results.

The lower numbers in the raising 3 year olds, raising 4 year olds, and particularly the raising 5 year olds suggest the hunting pressure has increased.

It would seem, Covid social disruption caused the locals to spend more time enjoying their I forest with a rifle in hand.







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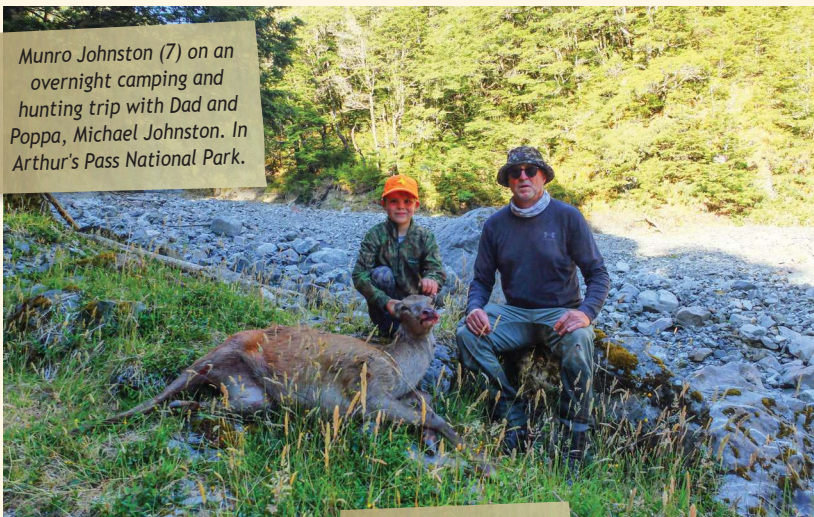
The winning photo receives a Hunting & Fishing voucher to the value of \$100. Send all your photos to [editor@nzhunter.co.nz](mailto:editor@nzhunter.co.nz)

Note: Photos must be of a suitable size for printing - a minimum file size of 1MB is preferred.



### Grand Winner

Beren Howie (11) years old  
shot this billy goat with a  
Savage 270

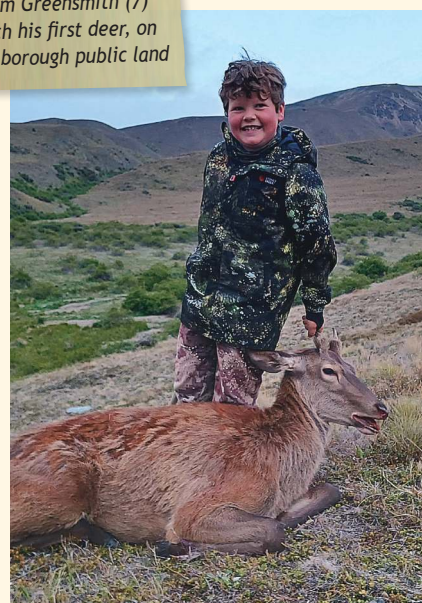


Munro Johnston (7) on an  
overnight camping and  
hunting trip with Dad and  
Poppa, Michael Johnston. In  
Arthur's Pass National Park.



Gracie Hamilton with a  
Canada goose

Sam Greensmith (7)  
with his first deer, on  
Marlborough public land



Bassett brothers, Campbell  
and Lachie, from the  
Wairarapa with a nice eater



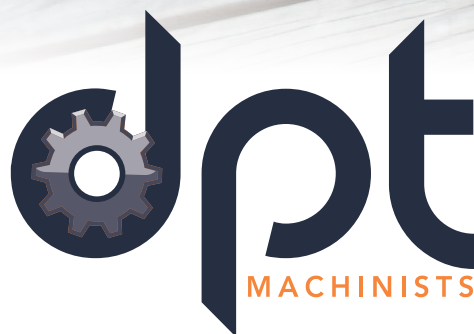
Jack MacDonald and his first  
goat with his new bow shot in  
the Wairoa area



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FQ35	1800m	12.54° x 10.05°	1.82-14.56, x8		\$4,399.00
FH35	1800m	7.53° x 5.65°	3.03-2.24, x8	384 x 288, 12 µm, NETD < 20mK	\$3,299.00
FH25	1200m	10.5° x 7.9°	2.17-17.36, x8		\$2,899.00

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C32F-RL	400m			2560x 1440, 850nm	\$1,999.00
C32F-RNL	350m			2560x 1440, 940nm	\$1,999.00
C32F-S	400m	8.1° x 6.1°	2.70, x8	2560x 1440, 850nm	\$1,399.00
C32F-SL	400m			2560x 1440, 850nm	\$1,999.00
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Donated wild game meat, such as this from the 2020 Fiordland project, helps feed vulnerable families and enhance community perceptions of the hunting sector

# THE GAC UPDATE

## Hunters remain at the heart of successful conservation

**When the Te Ara ki Mua wild animal management framework was released in June 2022 one of its key principles was the involvement of communities and hunters in the management of deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs, and the control of goats.**

To those involved in local conservation work, the positive role of the community is obvious. However, we should never take political support for local conservation for granted and we need to remain vigilant to make sure that local people (including hunters) remain at the very heart of conservation and game animal management in New Zealand.

**The reason I raise this point, is not to unnecessarily provoke anxiety amongst hunters that they will suddenly be cut out of the system.** In fact, I think right now the very opposite is true. Hunters and hunting organisations are increasingly seen by decision-makers as part of the solution and are widely acknowledged to have the skills and expertise to contribute in a significant way to positive conservation outcomes. However, we must not rest on our laurels and we must continue to prove ourselves.

So, while the sector is now more 'inside the tent' than ever, there exists significant opposition to the place of game animals in New Zealand and the enhanced role the hunting sector plays in management and more broadly, community conservation. There are those who consider our interests to be opposed to conservation and environmental efforts and they will continue to justify this with disingenuous characterisations of hunters and our motivations.

**To counter these perceptions, we must focus on what we do best.**

Hunters have a connection to the land and possess the kind of knowledge and experience that cannot be replaced by academic research or teams of policy advisors. Hunters rely on an understanding of the animals they hunt, their behaviour,

the state of their habitat, and how they are impacting the environment. In this way local hunters are often the first to notice changes in animal populations or habitat quality, and involving them further in monitoring and data collection can help identify where an ecosystem is under pressure. This is what the GAC sought to achieve with the research and management operation in the Lake Sumner RHA last year, which not only successfully removed 126 breeding hinds but established through jaw and uterus analysis that the herd is in good health and not suffering from a lack of nutrition.

**Hunters also utilise their skills and the existence of game animals to help support their families and local communities.** In the wake of Cyclone Gabrielle, a huge effort was put in by hunters on the east coast of the North Island to provide donated meat to community organisations helping those in need. In the central North Island the Sika Foundation has an ongoing relationship with local foodbanks, which has resulted in over 4000kg of donated wild venison mince since 2021. There are many other such initiatives happening across the country, which are not only a significant public good but also enhance the standing of hunting and game animal management in the community.

Hunting has broader economic benefits for communities too. These range from the turnover derived from commercial hunting and tourism providers to the employment of local people. This hunting-based economic activity not only helps manage game animal populations but also provides for the means to support conservation. You only have to look at how the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation invests the funds they collect from their ballots, undertaking deer management and extensive predator trapping programmes, to see what a positive impact this can make.

**Conservation and game animal management are essential to protect New Zealand's unique biodiversity.**

However, while some are tempted to dictate to New Zealanders how this is to be achieved, real progress will only be made by working alongside local communities (including hunters) and acknowledging the importance of game animals as an important resource to them. This will help ensure that conservation and management strategies are tailored to the specific needs of local ecosystems, are culturally appropriate and retain the necessary community support to guarantee their longevity.



## 'BETTER HUNTING' HUNTER EDUCATION PROGRAMME ON TRACK FOR LAUNCH

The GAC's hunter safety and education programme, Better Hunting, is currently under development and on track for launch later in the year.

'Better Hunting' is to be a free online programme targeted predominantly at new and inexperienced hunters. Partly funded through the Jobs for Nature programme, it will be relevant both as a stand-alone hunting resource, and also as base knowledge that learners can take with them into practical programmes such as NZDA's HUNTS programme. It is being designed to provide people new to the sport with basic instruction on some of the knowledge

and skills required to be a safe and effective hunter in New Zealand. Course modules will cover such things as game animal management, bushcraft, firearm safety, how, when and what to hunt, and meat recovery.

**Development of the core hunting essentials and firearm essentials courses are progressing well. We want to thank the hunting and outdoor sector organisations that have provided their expertise and advice so far and look forward to further (and wider) collaboration.** The plan is to pilot the programme with stakeholders and then new hunters before we officially launch it.

Along with the core hunter education courses, there are plenty of little goodies being added that we hope even the most experienced hunters will find useful, interesting and educational.

*The NZ Game Animal Council is a statutory organisation working to improve the management of game animals and hunting for recreation, communities, commerce and conservation.*



# Better Hunting Aotearoa



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# GAINING ACCESS

## AND HOW TO KEEP IT!

WRITTEN BY  
COREY CARSTON | @COREYCARSTON.243

**It was kind of funny to be lying out in an extremely wet paddock, not far away from a main Otago highway watching countless cars all hurrying home from work**

**All the while we happily banged away at some good-sized mobs of parries and the odd unlucky mallard as they flew past to reach their nightly feeding grounds.**

As it got darker and all the cars had switched on their headlights we decided it was time to call it quits on what had been an exciting and profitable hunt.

We had a big pack up ahead of us and Dad and my son Jake had a good two-hour drive back home. David had an hours drive a head of him and I was lucky enough to be heading even further north to cross off something that I had on my bucket list since I was a kid. I was off to hunt a trophy ram and a huge Fallow buck the very next day.

Before the pack up could begin and, even though no one really had the time or inclination to do so, we lined up a substantial load of ducks and one swan for the customary photo. Most of the crew were well used to this ritual except Matt, our new farming mate, who

looked on wondering what all the fuss was about. He became much keener for a photo once he learnt he might make an edition of the mag.

This hunt had started a few days earlier when David had been driving past to pick up an awesome new decoy trailer and spotted a great mob of parries happily feeding in a rather obvious place - as mentioned previously, right beside a main road. Being the kind of guy who never lets a good opportunity pass he called in and managed to track the owner down.

He explained who he was and asked if there was any chance we could hunt the parries one day in the coming week. Matt the farmer explained that they normally hunt them themselves but, with a year of disruption behind him, he hadn't had the chance yet and agreed

to us coming up two days before the main Otago duck season finished. Being the good social type David asked if he had ever shot out of a layout blind and would he like to tag along.

The resulting answers were *"no, he had never shot out of one"* and *"yes, if he had the time he would very much like to squeeze in one last hunt."*

Matt said he had a bit of work to do before he could turn up to hunt. We later found out his farm work was interlaced with chasing mobs of parries off not only his place but the neighbors too. What a top bloke. Funnily enough, this is just one of the many times farmers have gone out of their way to help us out when they didn't really need to.

A lot of my hunting throughout the year is reliant on the trust and generosity of farmers giving me access to their properties. Without access to what is essentially their backyards my hunting exploits would only be a shadow of what they are.

### **BE RESPECTFUL**

**One farm I gained access to for goose hunting shows how being respectful and doing what was**



**asked of us resulted in getting almost sole hunting rights, and another crew being side-lined.**

These particular hunters lived a reasonable distance away from the farm and expected that the sharemilker should do daily scouting reports for them. When she told them she was paid to farm cows not geese and simply didn't have the time to be driving around the farm doing recon work for them, the three hunters got rather abusive towards her. So much so that the owner of the farm had to contact the lead hunter to tell him their behaviour had crossed the line.

**The straw that broke the camel's back was the next time they arrived to hunt.** For some bizarre reason they left their metal decoy stakes in the paddock after the hunt. I guess they had planned on a return hunt? The problem was they didn't tell anyone and when the workers went into the paddock to cut it for bailage they hit the stakes resulting in a lot of swearing and broken mower blades and requiring a trip in to town for new ones.

Pete and I had recently started to hunt this particular farm and always try to do the right thing - hunting the geese as soon as we could (to stop what was a fair bit of damage to pasture) and respecting the access we have kept us hunting there to this day. We also managed to kill and move on some large tallies of geese. After all the dramas with the previous hunters it would have been easy for them to exclude all hunters and just scare them away every day but they took a chance on us when they really didn't have to.

## **DON'T BE SHY**

**Another example that comes to mind is a place found by my brother Stacy and I that always brings back fond memories and big piles of ducks.** We had been driving past this spot for a few years and had always talked about calling in to ask if we could hunt the numerous grain paddocks, and maybe sneak a quick jump shoot in on the awesome little stream that flowed along the boundary. However, a hunting buddy who shot on a nearby farm, had warned us to stay away, as the farmer was a real grumpy bastard and there's no way we'd get access.

One day in summer, when we were in the general area returning from a fishing trip, we thought "nothing ventured

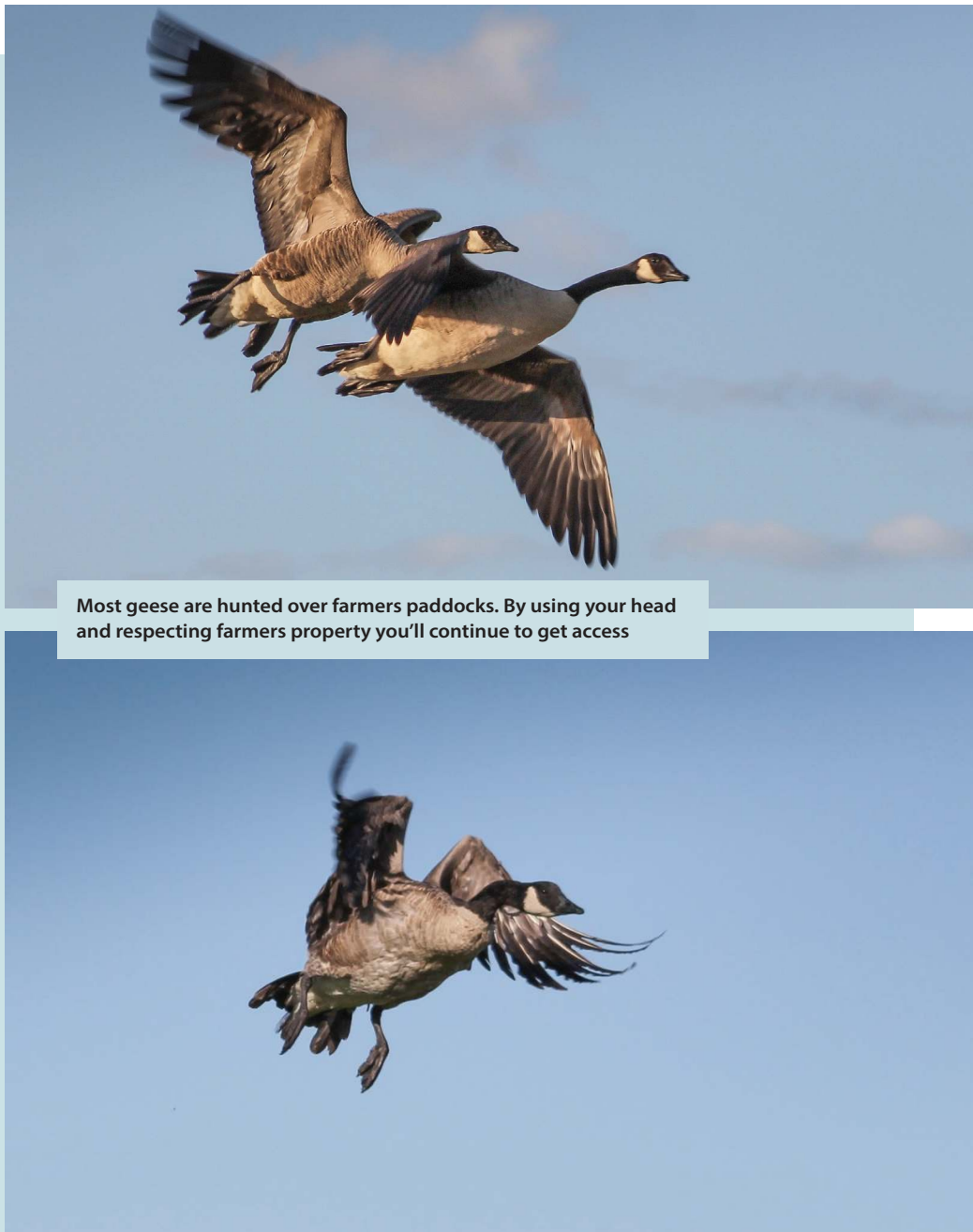
nothing gained" and along with our good mate Blair rather cautiously called in to see if there was any chance of access. We were subsequently met at the door by a very friendly farmer who was chuffed that three young chaps had made the effort to call in well before duck season. He admitted he did get rather grumpy when during the season he could hear gun shots on the river from other hunters who hadn't asked permission and had told a few jokes over the years to bugger off. One of those guys that he had spoken to was our mate, who it turned out had hopped the fence and given the farmer's wife a big fright as she was shifting sheep when a volley of unexpected shots rang out!

## **MY TIPS**

**Picture this. You're a farmer, you're tired, it's wet and muddy and a truck comes speeding up your**

**driveway.** Actually you can hear the truck well before it stops in front of the house. Whoever is in it has the volume on the stereo cranked up loud, blaring our , some awful rubbish, just the sort of stuff you despise. It's a nice looking truck but the first thing that strikes you is the "F##k 1080" stickers plastered all over it. Still, that's better to look at than the crude and embarrassing stick-people stickers doing what farm animals do. The guys in the passenger seats are knocking back what looks like a few ales all the while trying and failing to keep the noisy dog that's trying to climb out the open window in check. The door opens and a ruff looking bugger jumps out dressed up like Rambo. Without introducing himself he asks if the mob of ducks/geese/bush edge is on your property. Then when you give him the affirmative, proceeds to ask if he and the rest of the crew can go down for a bomb up. If you were the farmer what would you say? I know I'd be telling

**Most geese are hunted over farmers paddocks. By using your head and respecting farmers property you'll continue to get access**







There would be no grain hunts without farmers



I'm not saying you need to dress up but first impressions count, and if you're dressed like a hobo your chances of making a good first impression plummet.

Farmer's driveways can also double as a lane for stock and racing up them

like you're a rally driver not only is not a good look but could result in scaring or injuring some livestock. Dogs or kids could be running around anywhere.

Drinking is definitely a no-no, as is having a dog in a vehicle that can't be controlled. If you can't control your animal in a confined space a farmer quite rightly won't have any confidence in it being around his precious stock.

Another big don't is act like a know-it-all. You may be New Zealand's best hunter but you don't have to let the world know.

Don't assume the person who opens

the door to give you permission is the actual owner or manager. In my region there's a good number of smiling farm workers who are more than happy for you to fill your boots but don't actually have the permission to grant you access. They are just trying to be friendly but haven't got the authority to grant you permission. Always ask to speak to the farm owner or the manager. If in doubt always check things out.

## Some do's

**Be polite! And try to talk to them face to face as opposed to ringing or texting.** Sometimes it can't be avoided as most country folk are rather busy and that it could be the only way to touch base. Remember it's easier to say no over the phone than to someone who's made an effort face-to-face.

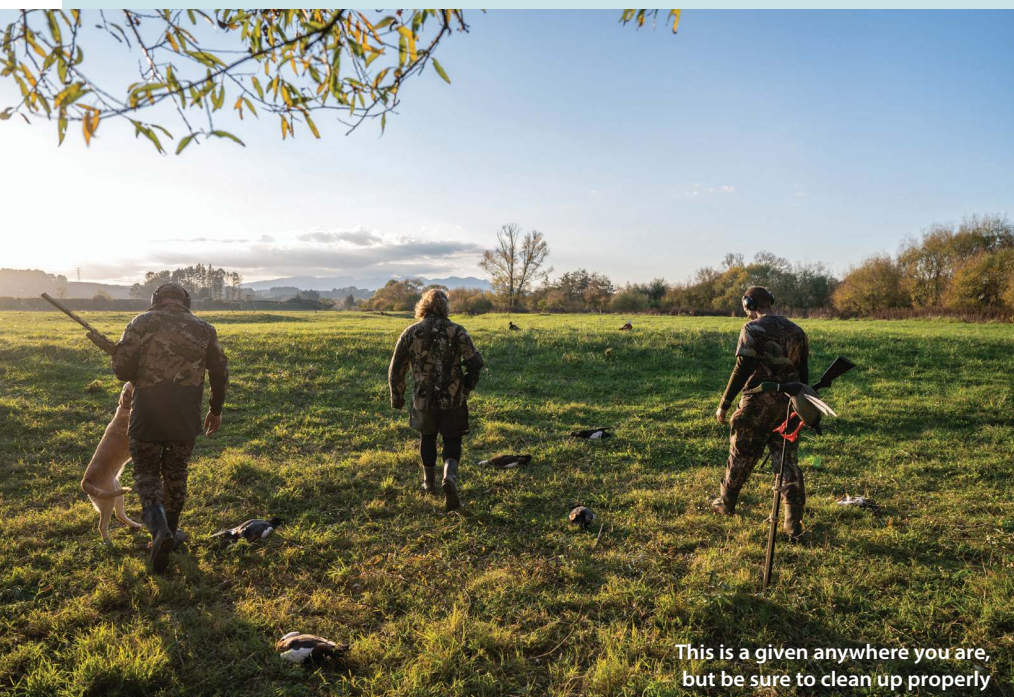
Explain who you are and what you would like to do. Some farmers may not want you to hunt their ponds but are more than happy for you to hunt paddocks.

If permission is granted do what you're asked to do. If you're told to not go into a particular spot then don't.

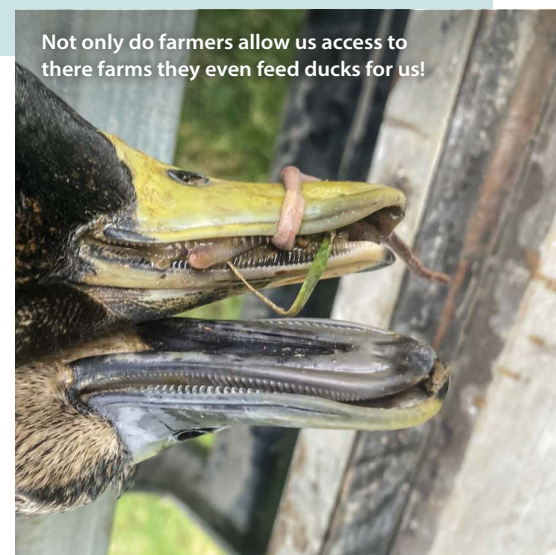
## Some don'ts

**When I'm scouting or driving back from a hunt I always have some reasonably sensible non-camo hunting clothes to wear.** Why?

Because not everyone loves camo as much as we do! It can intimidate people who've dealt with munters in the past.



This is a given anywhere you are, but be sure to clean up properly



Not only do farmers allow us access to there farms they even feed ducks for us!



Ask if it's ok to drive into the paddocks and don't take it for granted that you can.

Ask if you're able to take your four-legged companion and if so, have a vet inspection certificate at hand to show its vaccination history. Having this particular piece of paper has helped me to get access to farms that otherwise would be closed to me.

Leave gates as you find them. Nothing wrecks a farmer/hunter relationship than gates left open and stock getting mixed up or out onto a road.

If you're refused permission thank them for their time anyway. There may be a specific reason why you can't at that particular time and by being gracious you have another opportunity further down the track. Bear in mind farmers like a good yarn and will often tell other farmers about that guy that turned up wanting to hunt and what a dork they were when they were refused access.

As farmers often like a good yarn, have one. Even if it's just about the weather or how the season is going a good conversation goes a long way to showing that you're a reasonable person.

Try to turn up at a farmer friendly time if possible.

If you come across any unwell stock or anything you may have think they haven't notice let them know ASAP. I once stumbled onto a good hunt by calling into a house and letting them know there were some cows on the road.

Handshakes go a hell of a long way to building trust.

Always use your manners. Thanking them after the hunt is always a nice thing to do. Once we gained access from a semi-reluctant farmer to hunt one of his grain paddocks. After a very successful hunt we called in to once again thank them for the access and happily the farmer, who wasn't expecting us to call back in, offered for us to call back anytime.



Always check to see if your able to bring your four-legged hunting companions, don't just take it for granted

Calling into a strangers place can be rather nerve racking at times but the benefits of doing so has helped me shoot so many more waterfowl that I otherwise wouldn't have.

**Get out there and knock on some doors you may be surprised how you get on!**



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WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINESTON

# CUMBERLAND SAUSAGE

**A sausage is a cylindrical meat product usually made from ground meat, often pork, beef, veal or goat, along with salt, spices, and other flavourings, and sometimes breadcrumbs, encased by a skin.**

Traditionally the casings are made from intestine, but sometimes synthetic materials are used.

You could say sausages are as kiwi as it gets, up there with the meat pie, jandals and pav. How many fundraisers or charity events and sporting clubs use the sausage sizzle as a means of money making outside our DIY stores or on the side of sporting fields every Saturday, with a slice of white bread, tomato sauce and onions? I can remember fishing trips with my poppa, and we always had smoked sals for lunch out of a pot on the riverside, and when he was at work as a builder, he used to boil them in a jug. Saveloys are also a type of sausage and every kids party had little boys toys (cheerios) - it's a kiwi staple.

We embrace the sausage and have a competition for New Zealand's finest, sponsored by a butchery supplier. What I'm getting to here is that it doesn't have to be cheap and nasty, especially as we look in the supermarket and see the price of this gourmet item. I can remember when I was in London we used to make truffled duck and foie gras sausages on mash with a rich onion gravy, and would sell heaps for

an astronomical price. Again, in London, there was a place called Bubble Dogs and it sold champagne with very upmarket hot dogs.

If we look further afield just about every cuisine has a sausage. Germany alone is said to have over 1500 different types of sausage and some are protected under German law!! It's a staple food all over the world, but I do think it should have to contain a certain percentage of meat to be called a sausage - how can you call something a sausage that doesn't contain meat?! Why do you think us humans have the teeth we do, we eat meat!

I've made my own sausages for a while now and, in the past, Mr Greg D has asked me for a recipe for a venison sausage that has pure raw ingredients with no additives. More and more folk are going back to the basics and wish to know exactly what's in their food. This is where the The Butchers Accomplish comes into it, as I have recently been trialling some of their products. The difference with these guys is their packets are flavourings, not fillers with all the nasty stuff and additives, and you are the maker and the creator of the sausage

at home. So, the meat that you put into it will be the meat you get out. The flip side of this is that if you put in the scraps, trimmings, bruised meat and all the other rubbish then you will only end up with rubbish at the other end!

You can find The Butchers Accomplish sausage seasonings on The New Zealand Casings Co website ([www.nzcasings.co.nz](http://www.nzcasings.co.nz)) The range of flavours has expanded since I was trialling their products. They also sell pork fat and the skins or intestines for the sausages.

**"Deer Hunter"** - it was nice had a rounded flavour and didn't overpower the venison.

**"Goes with anything"** - I made these with wild pork, it was subtle and nice, so see how this would work with variety of meat.

**"Lamb and mint"** - this was probably the favourite of all the flavours and there was no mistaking the mint.

The trials that I have done with hunters and non-hunters alike have shown that they have all enjoyed the product. One person even cooked their sausages in the air fryer with great success, so cooking methods can vary with similar tasty results.

The recipe is simple, the instructions are clear, and the final product is enjoyable. Some equipment is required, a mincer



with a couple of different size plates and a sausage filler machine. Looking at a butchery website they list a manual vertical 2.3 kilogram machine for \$323 - this is what I use at work and have used it for 10+ years. You may also find that homeware stores sell these at a cheaper price or as an attachment to your kitchen mixer. The issue you may have is tying the sausages or linking them but, never fear as NZCC have that covered as well with a video link – very handy as I'm not going to try and explain that!! Or you can flick back to Issue 83 where the NZ Sausage Casing Co. wrote a detailed article on sausage-making.

Better yet, and for the purpose of this article, make a Cumberland sausage! Just measure 50 centimetres of filled sausage and roll it up, place a skewer through the middle so it doesn't unravel as you cook it, and make sure you knot the ends.

The key thing to remember when mincing is to always keep the meat cold (if not slightly frozen), and at the end you must hang the sausage in a

fridge overnight to allow the flavour to develop, the mix to settle and to dry the skins off. Consistency is also very important, and once you have some experience, you'll be able to eyeball it. In the meantime try the three second rule. Scoop some of the mix on to a spoon, turn it over, and it should stick for a good three seconds before dropping. Too stiff and it will hold fast to the spoon, too wet and it'll fall off straight away!

Cook slowly, turn often and don't prick them!

To give you some idea of quantity to skins required I used two tubes of skins for one packet of 'Goes with Anything' - about 11 kilograms of mix on the fat sausages, not the skinny chipolatas style.

Otherwise, if you can't be bothered with making sausages then "Cured" in Christchurch is a great place to check out online for sausages and small goods. Again, make sure it is good, clean, and trimmed meat - you can only pass off so much grass as chopped herbs!!



## BASIC CUMBERLAND SAUSAGE

- 5kg trimmed pork, with about 20% fat content
- 175 gm seasoning (see below)
- 6 eggs
- 12gm dextrose or sugar
- 300gm breadcrumbs (could be gluten free if needed)
- 360gm semolina
- 1.4ltr ice cold water

### Method

Sprinkle dry ingredients onto meat and mix through. Mince the mixture through a 6mm plate. Add the beaten egg, and mix. Add the ice-cold water, mixing by hand until the desired texture is achieved (refer above). Force the mixture through a 4.5mm mincing plate. Fill into casings and link as desired.

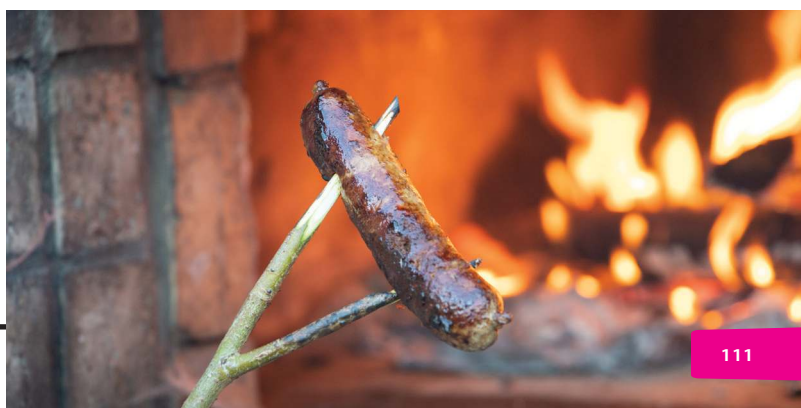


## CUMBERLAND SEASONING

- 600gm plain fine salt
- 90gm white pepper
- 50gm ground nutmeg
- 50gm ground mace
- 50gm ground coriander
- Sieve several times to combine

### Method

Sieve several times to combine. The excess will keep in an airtight container for further use.





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**PRIZES WILL BE  
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TERMS AND CONDITIONS: 1. This promotion offer is only available in conjunction with subscription sales. Drawn on 20th September 2023, and the winners will be given the choice of the prizes in the order they are drawn. 2. If NZ Hunter is unable to contact any winner after 1 month following the original draw date, having made reasonable efforts to do so, that winner's entry will be declared invalid and NZ Hunter reserves the right in its absolute discretion to randomly draw a new winner of that prize from eligible participants on the same terms and conditions as the original draw. 3. The judges decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 4. By entering this competition you agree to these terms and conditions. 5. The winners names and photos may be used by NZ Hunter for reasonable publicity purposes. NZ Hunter collects and holds the personal information provided with each entry to be used for the purposes of the promotion and in particular to notify prize winners and to verify prize winners identities. Entrants have the right to access and correct their personal information. 6. NZ Hunter reserves the right to extend, alter or conclude the promotion at any time should circumstances dictate. Should any disputes arise, the decision of NZ Hunter is final.

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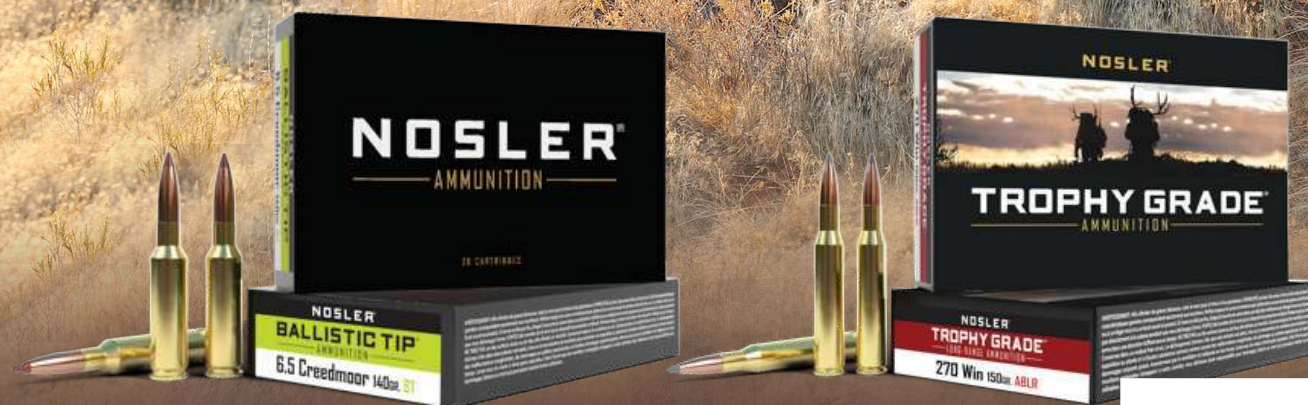
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